KIT AND KITTY

R·D·BLACKMORE

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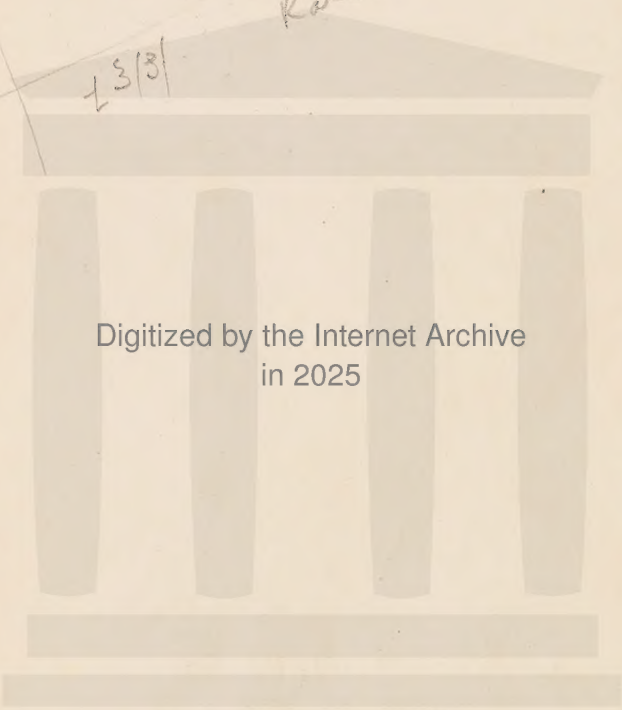

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KIT AND KITTY,

A Story of West Middlesex.

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE

AUTHOR OF "SPRINGHAVEN," "CHRISTOWELL," ETC.

"Si tu Caia, ego Caius."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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KIT AND KITTY.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE CORNY.

My name is Christopher Orchardson, of Sunbury in Middlesex; and I have passed through a bitter trouble, which I will try to describe somehow, both for my wife's sake and my own, as well as to set us straight again in the opinion of our neighbours; which I have always valued highly, though sometimes unable to show it. It has not been in my power always to do the thing that was wisest, and whenever this is brought up against me, I can make no answer; only to beg those who love blame to look at themselves, which will make their eyes grow kinder, before they begin to be turned on me.

For five and twenty years of life, I went on very happily, being of an unambitious sort, and

knowing neither plague nor pain, through the strength of my constitution, and the easiness of my nature. Most of my neighbours seemed to live in perpetual lack of something; and if ever they got it, they soon contrived to find something more to hanker for. There were times when I felt that I must be a fool, or to say the least a dullard, for slackness of perception, which kept me satisfied with the life I had to live. But two things may be pleaded well in my excuse on this account; in the first place, all my time was spent among creatures of no ambition—trees, and flowers, and horses, and the like, that have no worry; and what was even to the purpose more, I had no money to enlarge its love.

For my Uncle Cornelius—better known to all who had dealings with him as "Corny, the topper"—took care of me; and his main care was to make me useful, as an orphan should be. My father had been his elder brother, and had married rashly a lady of birth and education far above his own, but gifted with little else to help her, unless it were sweetness of disposition, and warmth of heart, and loveliness. These in a world like ours are not of much account for wearing; and she had no chance to wear them

out, being taken away quite suddenly. My life was given at the cost of hers; and my father, after lingering for a few months, took his departure to look for her.

Old people said that my Uncle Corny had been very fond of my mother, looking up to her in his youthful days, as a wonder of grace and goodness. And even now when he spoke about her, as I have known him do after a tumbler of grog, his hard gray eyes would glisten softly, like the vinery glass of an afternoon, when a spring cloud passes over it. But none the more for that did he ever plant a shilling in my youthful hand. This proves his due estimate of money as a disadvantage to the young.

My Uncle possessed an ancient garden, which had once belonged to a monastery; and the times being better than now they are, he was enabled to work it so that he made fair living out of it. We lived in an ancient cottage in the fine old village of Sunbury, or rather to the westward of that village, and higher up the river. Our window looked upon the Thames, with nothing more than the Shepperton road, and the slope of the bank to look over. What with water-works, grand villas, the railway, and other changes, the place is now so different

that a native may scarcely know it. But all was thoroughly simple, quiet, and even dull to lazy folk, in the days of which I am speaking.

My parents had managed to leave me so, or had it so managed by a higher power, that from my very infancy I was thrown upon Uncle Corny. He was a masterful man indeed, being of a resolute disposition, strong body, and stout sentiments. There was no mistaking his meaning when he spoke, and he spoke no more than a man is bound to do, for his own uses. Those who did not understand his nature said a great deal against him, and he let them say it to the width of their mouths. For he felt that he was good inside, and would be none the better for their meddling.

He was now about threescore years of age, and wished himself no younger, having seen enough of the world to know that to pass through it once is quite enough. Few things vexed him much, except to find his things sold below their value; and that far less for the love of money than from the sense of justice. But when he was wronged—as all producers, being one to a thousand, must be—he was not the man to make a to-do, and write to the papers about it. All he did was to drive his stick into the

floor, and look up at the ceiling. For his own part he was quite ready to be proved in the wrong, whenever he could see it ; and whatever may be said, I can answer for it, there are more men now than can be counted in a year, who are under Uncle Corny's mark ; while an hour would be ample for the names of those who would dare to look over my Uncle's head, when he comes to be judged finally.

All this is too much of a preface for him. His manner was always to speak for himself, and he must become somebody else, ere ever he would let his own nephew do it for him.

CHAPTER II.

MY KITTY.

The shape of a tree is not decided by the pruner only. When the leader is stopped, with an eye towards the wind, and the branches clipped to a nicety of experience and of forethought, and the happy owner has said to it—"Now I defy you to go amiss this season"—before he is up in the morning perhaps, his lecture is flown, and his labour lost.

My wise Uncle Corny had said to me, more times than I can remember—"Kit, you are a good boy, a very good boy, and likely to be useful in my business by and by. But of one thing beware—never say a word to women. They never know what they want themselves; and they like to bring a man into the same condition. What wonderful things I have seen among the women! And the only way out of it is never to get into it."

In answer to this I never said a word, being unable to contradict, though doubtful how far he was right. But it made me more shy than I was already, while at the same time it seemed to fill me with interest in the matter. But the only woman I had much to do with went a long way to confirm my Uncle's words. This was no other than Tabitha Tapscott, a widow from the West of England, who did all our cleaning and cooking for us, coming into the house at six o'clock in the summer, and seven in the winter time. A strange little creature she appeared to me, so different from us in all her ways, making mountains of things that we never noticed, and not at all given to silence.

Once or twice my Uncle Corny, after a glass of hot rum and water (which he usually had on a Saturday night, to restore him after paying wages) had spoken, in a strange mysterious style, of having "had his time," or as he sometimes put it—"paid his footing." It was not easy to make out his drift, or the hint at the bottom of it; and if any one tried to follow him home, sometimes he would fly off into rudeness, or if in a better vein, convey that he held his tongue for the good of younger people. Such words used to stir me sadly, because I could get no more of them.

However I began to feel more and more, as youth perhaps is sure to do when it listens to dark experience, as if I should like almost to go through some of it on my own behalf. Not expecting at all to leave it as a lesson for those who come after me, but simply desiring to enter into some knowledge of the thing forbidden. For I knew not as yet that there is no pleasure rich enough to satisfy the interest of pain.

It was on the first Sunday of September in the year 1860, that I first left all my peaceful ways, and fell into joy and misery. And strangely enough, as some may think, it was in the quiet evening service that the sudden change befell me. That summer had been the wettest ever known, or at any rate for four and forty years; as the old men said, who recalled the time when the loaves served out to their fathers and mothers stuck fast, like clay, upon the churchyard wall. Now the river was up to the mark of the road, and the meadows on the other side were lakes, and even a young man was well pleased to feel a flint under his foot as he walked. For the road was washed with torrents, and all the hedges reeking, and the solid trunks of ancient elms seemed to be channelled with perpetual drip.

But the sun began to shine out of the clouds, at his very last opportunity; and weak and watery though he looked, with a bank of haze beneath him, a soft relief of hope and comfort filled the flooded valley. And into our old western porch a pleasant light came quivering, and showed us who our neighbours were, and made us smile at one another.

As it happened now, my mind was full of a certain bed of onions, which had grown so rank and sappy, that we had not dared to harvest them. And instead of right thoughts upon entering church, I was saying to myself—"We shall have a dry week, I do believe. I will pull them to-morrow, and chance it." This will show that what now befell me came without any fault of mine.

For just as the last bell struck its stroke, and the ringer swang down on the heel of it, and the murmur went floating among the trees, I drew back a little to let the women pass, having sense of their feeling about their dresses, which is to be respected by every man. And in those days they wore lovely flounces, like a bee-hive trimmed with Venetian blinds. They had learned a fine manner of twitching up these, whenever they came to steps and stairs; and while they

were at it they always looked round, to make sure of no disarrangement. My respect for them made me gaze over their heads, as if without knowledge of their being there at all. Yet they whispered freely to one another, desiring to know if their ribands were right for the worship of the Almighty.

Now as I gazed in a general style, being timid about looking especially, there came into my eyes, without any sense of moment, but stealing unawares as in a vision, the fairest and purest and sweetest picture that ever went yet from the eyes to the heart. To those who have never known the like, it is hopeless to try to explain it; and even to myself I cannot render, by word or by thought, a mere jot of it. And many would say, that to let things so happen, the wits for the time must be out of their duty.

It may have been only a glance, or a turn of the head, or the toss of a love-lock—whatever it was, for me the world was a different place thereafter. It was a lovely and gentle face, making light in the gloom of the tower-arch, and touched with no thought of its own appearance, as other pretty faces were. I had never dreamed that any maiden could have said so much to me, as now came to me without a word.

Wondering only about her, and feeling abashed at my own footsteps, I followed softly up the church, and scarcely knew the button of our own pew-door. For Uncle Corny owned a pew, and insisted upon having it, and would allow no one to sit there, without his own grace and written order. He never found it needful to go to church on his own account, being a most upright man; but if ever he heard of any other Christian being shown into his pew, he put on his best clothes the next Sunday morning, and repaired to the sacred building, with a black-thorn staff which had a knob of obsidian. Such a thing would now be considered out of date; but the church was the church, in those more established times. Here I sat down in my usual manner, to the best of my power, because I knew how my neighbours would be watching me; and saying my prayers into the bottom of my hat. I resolved to remember where I was, and nothing else. But this was much easier said than done; for the first face I met, upon looking round, was that of Sam Henderson the racer, the owner of the paddocks at Halliford, a young man who thought a great deal of himself, and tried to bring others to a like opinion. He was not altogether a favourite of mine, although I knew

nothing against him; for he loved showy colours, and indulged in large fancies that all the young women were in love with him. Now he gave me a nod, although the clergyman was speaking, and following the turn of his eyes I was vexed yet more with his behaviour. He was gazing, as though with a lofty approval, and no sort of fear in his bright black eyes, at the face which had made me feel just now so lowly and so worthless.

In the Manor-pew, which had been empty nearly all the summer—for the weather had driven our ladies abroad—there she sat, and it made me feel as if hope was almost gone from me. For I could not help knowing that Mrs. Sheppard, who arranged all the worshippers according to their rank, would never have shown the young lady in there, unless she had been of high standing. And almost before I was out of that thought, my wits being quicker than usual, it became quite clear to me, who she was —or at any rate who was with her. From the corner of the pew there came and stood before her, as if to take general attention off, a highly esteemed and very well dressed lady, Mrs. Jenny Marker. This was the "lady housekeeper," as everybody was bound to call her who hoped to

get orders, at Coldpepper Hall, herself a very well-bred and most kind-hearted woman, to all who considered her dignity. Having always done this, I felt sure of her good word, and hoping much too hastily that the young lady was her niece, I made it feel perhaps less presumptuous on my part, to try to steal a glance at her, whenever luck afforded.

Herein I found tumultuous bliss, until my heart fell heavily. I was heeding very scantily the reading of the Minister, and voices of the Clerk and faithful of the congregation, when suddenly there came the words,—"the dignity of Princes." And then I knew, without thinking twice, that this young lady could never have won the dignity of the Manor-pew, unless she had been a great deal more than the niece of Jenny Marker. In a moment too, my senses came to back up this perception, and I began to revile myself for thinking such a thought of her. Not that Mrs. Marker was of any low condition, for she wore two rings and a gold watch-chain, and was highly respected by every one; but she cheapened all the goods she bought, even down to an old red herring, and she had been known to make people take garden-stuff in exchange for goods, or else forego her custom. The

memory of these things grieved me with my own imagination.

I was very loth to go—as you will see was natural—without so much as one good look at the sweet face which had blessed me; but everything seemed to turn against me, and the light grew worse and worse. Moreover Sam Henderson stared so boldly, having none of my diffidence, that Mrs. Marker came forward sharply, and jerked the rings of the red baize curtain, so that he could see only that. At this he turned red, and pulled up his collar, and I felt within myself a glow of good-will for the punching of his head. And perhaps he had grounds for some warm feeling towards me, for the reason that I being more to the left could still get a glimpse round the corner of the curtain, which acted as a total drop of scenery for him.

When the sermon was finished in its natural course, the sky was getting very dark outside, and the young men and women were on best behaviour to take no advantage of the gloom in going out. For as yet we had no great gas-works, such as impair in the present generation the romance and enlargement of an evening service. So that when we came forth, we were in a frame of mind for thinking the best of one another.

CHAPTER III.

THE TIMBER-BRIDGE.

By this time it had become clear to me, that whatever my thoughts were and my longings—such as those who are free from them call romantic—there was nothing proper for me to do, except to turn in at our own little gate, and be satisfied with my own duty inside. And this I was truly at the point of doing, although with very little satisfaction, when the glancing of the twilight down the road convinced me of a different duty. To the westward there happened just here to be a long stretch of lane without much turn in it, only guided and overhung partly with trees, and tufts of wild hops which were barren this year. And throughout this long course, which was wavering with gloom, a watery gleam from the west set in, partly perhaps from the flooded river, and partly from the last glance of sunset.

My hand was just laid upon our wicket-latch, and my mind made up for no thinking, when the figure of some one in the distance, like a call-back signal, stopped me. I had not returned, you must understand, by the shortest possible way from church, which would have taken me to Uncle Corny's door opposite the river; but being a little disturbed perhaps, and desiring to walk it off quietly, had turned up to the right towards the Halliford lane, to escape any gossip, and come back through our garden. And where I stood now, there was a view by daylight of nearly half a mile of lane, and the timber-bridge across the brook.

The lane was not quite straight, but still it bent in such an obliging manner, first to the left and then back to the right, that anything happening upon its course would be likely to come into view from our gate. And I saw as plainly as could be, although beyond shouting distance, a man with his arms spread forth, as if to stop or catch anybody going further, and nearer to me the forms of women desirous to go on, but frightened. It is not true that I stopped to think for one moment who those women were; but feeling that they must be in the right, and the man in the wrong as usual, without two endeavours

I was running at full speed—and in those days that was something—merely to help the right, and stop the wrong. And in less time than it takes to tell it, I was one of the party. Then I saw that the ladies were Mrs. Marker, and the lovely young maiden, who had been with her in church.

"Oh, Master Orchardson, you will take our part," Mrs. Marker cried, as she ran up to me; "you will take our part, as every good man must. That bad man says that we shall not cross the bridge, without—without—oh, it is too dreadful!"

"Without paying toll to me—this is kissing-bridge, and the wood is now kissing the water. 'Tis a dangerous job to take ladies across. Kit, you are come just in time to help. Let us have toll at the outset, and double toll upon landing, my boy. You take my lady Marker, Kit, because she is getting heavy; and I will take Miss Fairthorn."

Sam Henderson spoke these words as if we had nothing to do but obey him. Perhaps as a man who was instructing horses, he had imbibed too much of the upper part. At any rate I did not find it my duty to fall beneath his ordering. And as if to make me stand to my

own thoughts, the sweetest and most pitiful glance that had ever come to meet me, came straight to my heart from a shadowy nook, where the beautiful maid was shrinking.

"Sam Henderson, none of this rubbish!" I shouted, for the roar of the water would have drowned soft words. "It is a coward's job to frighten women. A man should see first what the danger is."

Before he could come up to strike me, as his first intention seemed to be, I ran across the timbers which were bowing and trembling, with the strain upon the upright posts, as well as the wash upon their nether sides. And I saw that the risk was increasing with each moment, for the dam at the bottom of Tim Osborne's meadow, not more than a gunshot above us, was beginning to yield, and the flood checked by it was trembling like a trodden hay-rick. Upon this I ran back, and said, "Now, ladies, if cross you must, you must do it at once."

"Kit, you are a fool. There is no danger," Sam Henderson shouted wrathfully. "Who is the coward that frightens ladies now? But if you must poke in your oar without leave, you go first with Mother Marker, and I will come after you, with the young lady."

The maiden shrank back from his hand, and I saw that good Mrs. Marker was pained by his words. "Mother Marker will go first," she said, "but with no thanks to you, Mr. Henderson."

Her spirit was up, but her hands were trembling, as I took her Prayer-book from them.

"I may be a fool, but I am not a cub," I answered with a gaze that made Henderson scowl; "I would rather frighten ladies than insult them. Now, Mrs. Marker, give me one of your nice little hands, and have no fear."

The house-keeping lady put forth one hand, with a tender look at it, because it had been praised, and then she put forth one brave foot, and I was only afraid of her going too fast. The water splashed up between the three-inch planks, for the lady was of some substance; but she landed very well, and back I ran to see about her young companion.

"I will not go with you, sir; I will go alone. You do not behave like a gentleman," she was crying in great distress, as I came up, and Sam Henderson had hold of both her hands. This enraged me so that I forgot good manners, for I should not have done what I did before a lady. I struck Sam heavily between the eyes, and if I had not caught him by the collar, nothing

could have saved him from falling through the bush, into the deep eddy under the planks. As soon as I had done it, I was angry with myself, for Sam was not a bad fellow at all, when in his best condition. But now there was no time to dwell upon that, for the flood was arising and rolling in loops, like the back of a cat who has descried a dog.

"Now, or never, Miss," I cried; "the dam has given; in a minute, this bridge will be swept clean away."

She showed such bright sense as I never saw before, and never can hope to see in anybody else, however they may laugh through want of it. Without a word, or even a glance at me, she railed up her dress into a wondrous little circle, and gave me a hand which I had not the strength to think of, for fear of forgetting all the world outside. Taking it gently in my coarse hard palm, I said, "Come," and she came like an angel.

As I led her across, all my gaze was upon her; and this was a good thing for both of us. For a scream from Mrs. Marker, and a dreadful shout from Sam—who came staggering up to the brink and caught the handrail, just as we were shaking upon the middle dip—these, and

a great roar coming down the meadows, would probably have taken all my wits away, if they had been within me, as at ordinary times. But heeding only that which I was holding, I went in a leisurely and steady manner, which often makes the best of danger, and set the maiden safe upon the high stone at the end, and turned round to see what was coming.

Before I had time to do this, it was upon me, whirling me back with a blow of heavy timber, and washing me with all my best clothes on into the hedge behind the lane. Then a rush of brown water, like a drove of wild cattle leaping on one another's backs, went by, and the bridge was gone with it, like a straw hat in the wind. But the stone upon which the young lady stood was unmoved although surrounded, and I made signs to her—for to speak was useless—to lay hold of a branch which hung over her head. As she did so, she smiled at me, even in that terror; and I felt that I would go through a thousandfold the peril for the chance of being so rewarded.

Suddenly, as suddenly as it had mounted, the bulk of the roaring flood fell again, and the wreck of the handrail and some lighter spars of the bridge hung dangling by their chains. And soon as the peril was passed, it was hard to be-

lieve that there had been much of it. But any one listening to Mrs. Marker, as she came down the hill when it was over, must have believed that I had done something very gallant and almost heroic. But I had done nothing more than I have told; and it is not very likely that I would make too little of it.

"Brave young man!" cried Mrs. Marker, panting, and ready to embrace me, if I had only been dry; "you have saved our lives, and I would say it, if it were my last moment. Miss Kitty, I never saw such valour. Did you ever, in all your life, dear?"

"Never, dear, never! Though I had not the least idea what this gentleman was doing, till he had done it. Oh, he must be sadly knocked about. Let me come down, and help him."

"He put you up there, and he shall fetch you down. Nobody else has the right to do it. Mr. Orchardson, don't be afraid; assist her."

Now this shows how women have their wits about them, even at moments most critical. The housekeeper had fled with no small alacrity, when the flood came roaring; and now with equal promptitude she had returned, and discovered how best to reward me.

"I think you might give me a hand," said

the young lady, still mounted on the high stone with our parish-mark, upon which by some instinct I had placed her.

"I cannot; I am trembling like an aspen-leaf," Mrs. Marker replied, though she looked firm enough; "but our gallant preserver is as strong as he is brave. Don't be afraid of his touching you, because he is a little damp, Miss Kitty."

This was truly clever of her, and it stopped all reasoning. With a glance of reproach, the maiden gathered her loosened cloak more tightly, and then gave me both her hands and sprang; and I managed it so that she slid down into my arms. This was not what she intended, but there was no help for it, the ground being very slippery after such a flood. She seemed lighter than a feather, and more buoyant than a cork; though some of that conclusion perhaps was due to my impressions. Be that either way, I could never have believed that anything so lovely would be ever in my hold; and the power of it drove away my presence of mind so badly, that I was very near forgetting the proper time for letting go.

And this was no wonder, when I came to think about it; the only wonder was that I could show such self-command. For the breath

of her lips was almost on mine, and her blushes so near that I seemed to feel their glow, and the deep rich blue of her eyes so close that they were like an opening into heaven. My entire gift of words was gone, and I knew not what I did or thought.

But suddenly a shout—or a speech if one could take it so—of vulgar insolence and jealousy most contemptible, broke on my lofty condition. Sam Henderson had been left in black dudgeon on the other side of the water, and the bridge being swept away, he could not get at us. We had forgotten all about him; however he had managed to run away, when the great billow came from the bursting of the sluice; and now he showed his manners and his thankfulness to God, by coming to the bank and shouting, while he grinned, and clapped his hands in mockery—

"Kit, and Kitty! Kit and Kitty! That's what I call coming it strong; and upon a Sunday evening! Mother Marker, do you mean to put up with that? See if I don't tell your Missus. Kit, and Kitty! Oh Lord, oh Lord! 'Tis as good as a play, and we don't get much of that sort of fun in Sunbury. Holloa! What the deuce——"

His speech was ended, for I had caught up a big dollop of clod from the relics of the flood, and delivered it into his throat so truly that his red satin fall and mock-diamond pin—which were tenfold more sacred to him than the Sabbath—were mashed up into one big lump of mud, together with the beard he cherished. Labouring to utter some foul words, he shook his fist at me, and departed.

CHAPTER IV.

PEACHES, AND PEACHING.

THERE seem to be many ways of taking the very simplest fact we meet; and if any man was sure to take things by his own light, it was my good Uncle. When a friend, or even a useful neighbour, offered a free opinion, my Uncle Cornelius would look at him, say never a word, but be almost certain to go downright against that particular view. One of his favourite sayings was, "Every man has a right to his own opinion," although he was a strict Conservative —and of that right he was so jealous, that he hated to have his opinions shared. And this was a very lucky thing for me, as I cannot help seeing and saying.

For the very next morning, a neighbour came in (when I was gone prowling, I need not say where) and having some business, he told Tabby Tapscott to show him where her master was

most likely to be found. This gentleman was Mr. Rasp, the baker, who kept two women, a man, and a boy, and did the finest trade in Sunbury. And what he wanted now was to accept my Uncle's offer, at which he had hum'd and hawed a week ago, of ten sacks of chat potatoes at fifteen pence a bushel, for the purpose of mixing with his best white bread. By the post of that morning Mr. Rasp had heard from the great flour-mills at Uxbridge, that good grindings were gone up six shillings a quarter, and sure to be quoted still higher next week, by reason of the cold wet harvest. But he did not intend to tell Uncle Corny this.

That excellent gardener was under his big wall, which had formed part of the monastic enclosure, and was therefore the best piece of brickwork in the parish, as well as a warm home and sure fortress to the peach and nectarine. This wall had its aspect about S.S.E., the best that can be for fruit-trees, and was flanked with return-walls at either end; and the sunshine, whenever there seemed to be any, was dwelling and blushing in this kind embrace. The summers might be bitter—as they generally are—but if ever a peach donned crimson velvet in the South of England out of

doors, it was sure to be sitting upon this old red wall and looking out for Uncle Corny.

Mr. Cornelius Orchardson, as most people called him when they tried to get his money, glanced over his shoulder when he heard the baker coming, and then began to drive a nail with more than usual care. Not that he ever drove any nail rashly, such an act was forbidden by his constitution; but that he now was in his deepest calm, as every man ought to be in the neighbourhood of a bargain. His manner was always collected and dry, and his words quite as few as were needful; and he never showed any desire to get the better of any one, only a sense of contentment, whenever he was not robbed. This is often the case with broad-shouldered people, if they only move quietly and are not flurried; and my good Uncle Corny possessed in his way every one of these elements of honesty.

"Good morning, Mr. Orchardson!" said Rasp the baker. "What a pleasure it is to see a glimpse of sun at last! And what a fine colour these red bricks do give you!"

"As good as the bakehouse," said my Uncle shortly. "But look out where you are treading, Rasp. I want every one of them straw-

berry-runners. What brings you here? I am rather busy now."

"Well, I happened to see as your door was open, so I thought I'd just jog your memory, to have them potatoes put up in the dry, while I've got my copper lighted."

"Potatoes! Why, you would not have them, Rasp. You said fifteen pence a bushel was a deal too much, and potatoes were all water such a year as this. And now I've got a better customer."

"Well, it don't matter much either way," said the baker; "but I always took you, Mr. Orchardson, to be a man of your word, sir—a man of your word."

"So I am. But I know what my words are; and we came to no agreement. Your very last words were—'A shilling, and no more.' Can you deny that, Rasp?"

"Well, I didn't put it down, sir, and my memory plays tricks. But I told my wife that it was all settled; and she said, 'Oh, I do like to deal with Mr. Orchardson, he gives such good measure.' So I brought round the money in this little bag, thirty-seven shillings and sixpence. Never mind for a receipt, sir; everybody knows what you are."

"Yes, so they do," answered Uncle Corny; "they'd rather believe me than you, Master baker. Now how much is flour gone up this morning, and floury potatoes to follow it? Never a chat goes out of my gate, under one and sixpence a bushel."

"This sort of thing is too much for me. There is something altogether wrong with the times. There is no living to be made out of them." Mr. Rasp shook his head at the peaches on the wall, as if they were dainties, he must not dare to look at.

"Rasp, you shall have a peach," declared my Uncle Corny, for he was a man who had come to a good deal of wisdom; "you shall have the best peach on the whole of this wall, and that means about the best in England. I will not be put out with you, Rasp, for making a fine effort to cheat me. You are a baker; and you cannot help it."

If any other man in Sunbury was proud of his honesty, so was Rasp; and taking this speech as a compliment to it, he smiled and pulled a paper-bag from his pocket, to receive the best peach on the wall for his wife.

"What a difference one day's sun has made! At one time I doubted if they would colour, for

it is the worst summer I have known for many years. But they were all ready, as a maiden is to blush, when she expects her sweetheart's name. With all my experience, I could scarcely have believed it; what a change since Saturday! But 'live and learn' is the gardener's rule. *Galande*, the best peach of all, in my opinion, is not yet ripe; but *Grosse Mignonne* is, and though rather woolly in a year like '57, it is first-rate in a cool season. Observe the red spots near the caudal cavity—why bless my heart, Rasp, I meant that for your wife!"

"My wife has a very sad toothache to-day, and she would never forgive me if I made it worse. But what wonderful things they are to run!"

This baker had a gentle streak of juice in either runnel of his chin, which was shaped like a well-fed *fleur-de-lis;* and he wiped it all dry with the face of the bag, upon which his own name was printed.

"I knows a good thing, when I sees it; and that's more than a woman in a hundred does. Don't believe they can taste, or at least very few of them. Why, they'd sooner have tea than a glass of good beer! Howsoever, that's nought to do with business. Mr. Orchardson,

what's your lowest figure? With a wall of fruit coming on like them, sixpence apiece and some thousands of them, you mustn't be hard on a neighbour."

My Uncle sat down on his four-legged stool (which had bars across the feet, for fear of sinking, when the ground was spongy), and he pulled his bag of vamp-leather to the middle of his waistcoat, and felt for a shred and a nail. He had learned that it never ends in satisfaction, if a man grows excited in view of a bargain, or even shows any desire to deal. Then he put up his elbow, and tapped the nail in, without hitting it hard, as the ignorant do.

"Come, I'll make a fair offer," the baker exclaimed, for he never let business do justice to itself; "an offer that you might call handsome, if you was looking at it in a large point of view. I'll take fifty bushels at fifteen pence, pick 'em over myself, for the pigs and the men; and if any crusty people turn up, why here I am!"

"Rasp, you make a very great mistake," said my Uncle, turning round upon his stool, and confronting him with strong honesty, "if you suppose that I have anything to do with the use you make of my potatoes. I sell you my goods for the utmost I can get, and you take good

care that it is very little. What you do with them afterwards is no concern of mine. I owe you no thanks, and you know me not from Adam, the moment you have paid me. This is the doctrine of free-trade—you recognise everything, except men."

"Tell you what it is," replied the baker; "sooner than vex you, Mr. Orchardson, I'll give sixteen pence all round, just as they come out of the row. Who could say fairer than that now?"

"Eighteen is the money. Not a farthing under. From all that I can hear, it will be twenty pence to-morrow. Why, here's another fine peach fit to come! I shall send it to your wife, and tell her you ate hers."

The gardener merrily nailed away, while the baker was working his hands for nothing. "You would never do such a thing as that," he said; "a single man have no call to understand a woman; but he knows what their nature is, or why did he avoid them? My wife is as good a woman as can be; but none of them was ever known to be quite perfect. If it must be eighteen, it must—and I'll take fifty."

"Ah, couldn't I tell you a bit of news?" said the baker, as he counted out the money. "You are such a silent man, Mr. Orchardson, that a

man of the world is afraid of you. And the young fellow, your own nevvy—well, he may take after you in speech, but not about the ladies—ah, you never would believe it!"

"Well then, keep it to yourself, that's all. I don't want to hear a word against young Kit. And what's more—if I heard fifty, I wouldn't believe one of them."

"No more wouldn't I. He's as steady a young fellow as ever drove a tax-cart. And so quiet in his manners, why, you wouldn't think that butter——"

"His mother was a lady of birth and breeding. That's where he gets his manners from; though there's plenty in our family, for folk that deserve them. Out with your news, man, whatever it is."

"Well, it don't go again him much," the baker replied, with some fear—for my Uncle's face was stern, and the wall-hammer swung in his brown right hand; "and indeed you might take it the other way, if he had done it all on his road home from church. You know the bridge over the Halliford brook, or at least where it was, for it's all washed away, as you heard very likely this morning. What right had your nevvy there, going on for dark?"

My Uncle was a rather large-minded man; but without being loose, or superior. "Rasp, if it comes to that," he said, "what right have you and I to be anywhere?"

"That's neither here nor there," answered the baker, having always been a man of business; "but wherever I go, I pay my way. However your Kit was down there, and no mistake. What you think he done? He punched Sam Henderson's head to begin with, for fear of him giving any help, and then he jumped into the water, that was coming like a house on fire from Tim Osborne's dam, and out of it he pulled Mother Marker, and the pretty young lady as had been in church."

"Kit can swim," said my Uncle shortly. "It is a very dangerous trick to learn, being bound to jump in, whenever any one is drowning. Did the women go in, for him to pull them out?"

"Ah, you never did think much of them, Mr. Corny; but you never had no inskin experience. Take 'em all round, they are pretty nigh as good as we are. But they never jumped in—no, you mustn't say that. They were bound to go home, and they were doing of it, till the flood took their legs from under them. Mrs. Marker have been, this very morning, convers-

ing along of my good missus, and was likely to stop when I was forced to come away, and you should hear her go on about your Kit! And nobody knows if she has any friends. I am told when her time comes to go to heaven, she will have the disposal of four hundred pounds."

"You be off to your wife!" cried Uncle Corny; "Mrs. Marker is quite a young woman yet, but old enough to have discovered what men are. Go to your work, Rasp. I hate all gossip. But I am glad that Kit thrashed Sam Henderson."

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE TIFF.

Everybody knows, as he reads his newspaper, that nothing has ever yet happened in the world with enough of precision and accuracy to get itself described, by those who saw it, in the same, or in even a similar manner. No wonder then that my little adventure—if I have any right to call it mine—presented itself in many different lights, not only to the people among whom it spread, but even to the few who were present there and then. Mrs. Jenny Marker's account of what had happened was already very grand, that Sunday eve; but as soon as she had slept and dreamed upon it, her great command of words proved unequal to the call made at the same moment by the mind and heart. Everybody listened, for her practice was to pay every little bill upon a Monday morning; and almost everybody was convinced that she was right.

"Miraculous is the only word that I can think of," she said to Mrs. Cutthumb, who sold tin-tacks and cabbages; "not a miracle only of the sandy desert, but of the places where the trees and waters grow."

"The Jordan perhaps you means, Mrs. Marker, ma'am? Or did you please to have in your mind the Red Sea?"

"They were both in my mind, and both come uppermost at the same moment, Mrs. Cutthumb. But the best authorities inform us now, that we must not look for more than we can understand. Yet I cannot understand, how Kit Orchardson contrived after pulling me out to pull out our Miss Kitty. But look, here he comes! Why, he is everywhere almost. He seems to swing along so. His uncle ought to work him harder. Not that he is impudent. No one can say that of him. Too bashful for a man, in my opinion. But he seems to have taken such a liking to me; and I must be his senior by a considerable time. I will go into your parlour, my dear Mrs. Cutthumb, and then I can look out for our poor Miss Kitty—ah, she is so very young, and no one to stand up for her!"

"Excuse me, Miss Marker, if you please,"

said Mrs. Cutthumb; "but if I may make so bold to say, you are very young yourself, Miss, in years, though not in worship. And to be run away with from school is a thing that may occur to any girl when bootiful. But concerning of Miss Kitty—bless her innocent young face!—what you was pleased to say, ma'am, is most surprising."

"No, Mrs. Cutthumb, very far from that, when you come to consider what human nature is. I never could do such things myself; I never could sleep easy in my bed, if I thought that they ever could be imputed to me. But when we look at things, it is our duty to remember that the world is made up of different people from what we are."

"What experience you have had, ma'am, and yet keeping your complexion so! Ah, if my poor Cutthumb could have kept away from the imperial! But he said it were the duty of a Briton, and he done it. Sally, get away into the back yard, with your dolly. I beg your pardon, ma'am, for interrupting you of your words so."

"Well, one thing I make a point of is," Mrs. Marker continued with a gentle frown, "never to enter into any domestic affairs, though with-

out any bias of any sort, out of doors. We all have enough, as you know, Mrs. Cutthumb, and sometimes more than we can manage, to regulate our own histories. Miss Coldpepper is a remarkable lady, so very, so highly superior; but her niece, our Miss Kitty, does not seem as yet to take after her in that particular; and scarcely to be wondered at, when you remember that she is not her niece at all of rights. But this is not a question to interest you much, nor any one outside of what I might call the Coldpepper domesticity."

"What superior words you always do have, as it were in your muff, Mrs. Marker! But if you please to mean, Miss—being still so young I slips into it naturally—the Coldpepper Manor, why I was born upon it, and so was my parents before me. And that makes it natural, as you might say, and proper for me to have a word to say about them. I remember all the Coldpeppers, since I was that high; and it shall never go no further."

"There is nothing to conceal. You must never fancy that of them. The Coldpeppers always were a haughty race and headstrong; but bold, and outspoken, and defying of their neighbours. It was bad for any one who crossed

them; you know that, if you remember old Squire Nicholas. But Miss Kitty Fairthorn is not a Coldpepper. You see you don't know everything about them, Mrs. Cutthumb. The Captain had been married, before he ever saw Miss Monica."

"Lor', Mrs. Marker, you quite take my breath away! And yet I might have known it, I was bound almost to know it, the moment one comes to reflection. 'Kitty's' not a name at all becoming to the rank of the Manor of Coldpepper. I've been wondering about it many's the time; Arabella and Monica sounds something like; but Kitty isn't fit, except for women that has to get their own livelihood. Well, it eases my mind that she is not a Coldpepper."

"No, Mrs. Cutthumb; but she is a Fairthorn; and from all I hear the Fairthorns are much better known, in the great world of London, than our Coldpeppers. Captain Fairthorn is a man who has discovered more than the whole world knew in our fathers' days. He can make a bell ring in John o'Groat's house, he can blow up a cliff at the Land's End from London, he knows every wrinkle at the bottom of the sea, he can make a ghost stand at eight corners of a room."

"Can he save his own soul, ma'am?" the

greengrocer asked in a solemn voice, being a strict Wesleyan. "Them vanities, falsely called Science nowadays, is the depth of the snare of the Evil One. A learned man knows all the bottom of the sea, and leaves his own child to be drownded in a brook, without it was for young Kit Orchardson. Can he save his own soul, Mrs. Marker, ma'am?"

"Well, if I was to go by guesswork, I should say that he has not got very much of that to call his own. You know what Miss Monica was; although she has been such a time away from Sunbury. She took her first husband in spite of her father, and the second without a word to anybody. She had a son and two daughters by the Honourable Tom Bulwrag, and within a year after him she carried off poor Captain, who is now called Professor Fairthorn. But there, I am told, though I never set eyes on him, being made up of telegraphs, and batteries, and magnesia, and a thing they call hiderography, he is hardly ever at home for a week together, and knows more about the ocean's bed than about his own. And a lucky thing for him; for wouldn't she be a nagger, if ever she could get the opportunity?"

"That seems to be most unnatural, and against the will of the Almighty," Mrs. Cutthumb replied after serious thought, "that a lady should wish to reprove her husband, and yet find no ear to put it into. With all his inventions for doing away distance, he ought to be able to manage it."

"It would make no difference, if he did, and could she expect him to pay for it? His mind is so taken up when he is at home, that she might as well go on at the bedpost. And if he was to open up his wires, it would be at his discretion to receive it all. This makes her rather harsh, as you can understand, with any one that has no help for it. And our poor Miss Kitty being always in the way, and a rival as it were to her own children, oh she does know what pepper is, hot and cold, and every colour!"

"Poor lamb! And she do look so innocent and sweet, and so deserving of a real mother. No father to look after her, by your own account, ma'am, and a step-mother doing it according to her liking. Why don't she run away, such a booty as she is?"

"She is too sweet-tempered and well-principled for that. And she thinks all the world of her father; all the more, no doubt, because he cannot

attend to her. His time is too precious for him to mind his daughter. Not that he is money-making—far the other way. Those great discoverers, as I have heard say, are the last to discover the holes in their pockets. Money, Mrs. Cutthumb, has been too long discovered for him to take any heed of it. And that makes another source of trouble in the household. To think of our sending the big carriage and two footmen, to find a young lady in the third class at Feltham! I took care to keep it from Miss Coldpepper."

"Oh, it would have been shocking," cried the widow with her hands up. "Why, the third class ain't good enough for a dead pig to drain in, any ways on the South-Western line. Well, ma'am, and how did Miss Coldpepper take it?"

"Of these things I never speak out of the house. We are liable to err, the very best of us I believe, and I know it from my own feelings. Those last twenty boxes of Star matches we had from you, Mrs. Cutthumb, were stars, and no mistake. Shooting stars they should be labelled. They go off like a cannon. I have had to pay for three new aprons, and it was a mercy they didn't set the house afire."

"Oh, they hussies—they never know how to strike them; and your Miss Coldpepper, she does change so often. Never so much as a month, ma'am, without some of them giving warning."

"That is no concern of yours, Mrs. Cutthumb. If you speak in this low style of Coldpepper Manor, it will have to withdraw its custom, ma'am, from your—your little establishment."

Mrs. Jenny Marker, as she spoke thus, gathered in her jacket, which was plaited with blue velvet,—because she was proud of her figure, or at least so some people said who could not well get at her pockets—and although she meant no more by this than to assert her own dignity, Mrs. Cutthumb, with all the fine feelings of a widow, was naturally hurt, and showed it. And strange enough to say, though it seems such a trifle, what ensued made a very great difference to me.

"I am truly grieved, madam," she said with a curtsey, "that my little house, which is the best I can afford, and my little shop, which was set up for me by very kind neighbours as owned no manors, when it pleased the Almighty to afflict me so, and deprive me of a good man

who could always pay his rent, and never would allow me to be put upon—— "

"A model husband, no doubt, Mrs. Cutthumb; except as I fancy you observed just now, for his devotion to the imperial pint,—or perhaps I should say gallon."

"May you never have a worse, if you ever catches any! And high time in life, ma'am, for you, Miss Jenny Marker, or Mrs. whichever you may be, and nobody in Sunbury knows the bottom of it, to be thinking a little now of your soul, ma'am, and less of your body, and the other things that perish. You draw in your cloak, ma'am, or it isn't a cloak, nothing so suitable and sensible as that, just as if my poor goods wasn't good enough to touch it! Perhaps that's the reason why you beats them down so. I beg you to remember, Jenny Marker, that I consider myself as good as you are, madam, though I am not tricked out with gewgaws and fal-lals. And what I eats, I earns, ma'am, and not the bread of servitude."

"That will do, my good woman. I never lose my temper; though I have never been insulted before like this, even by the lowest people. Send in your little bill, this very afternoon, if one of your wonderful neighbours

will be good enough to make it out for you, as you have never been taught to write, poor thing! But whoever does it must not forget to deduct the price of three rotten French eggs."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEAUTIES OF NATURE.

WHILE that bitter war was raging, I enjoyed a peaceful and gentle season. It happened that I had come up our village, on a matter of strict business, at a time of day not at all unlikely to be the very time of day mentioned overnight, as the one which would suit Mrs. Marker and Miss Fairthorn for doing a little business in our village. This might be explained, without any imputation on any one I have the pleasure of knowing, for all of them will admit at once that it needs no explanation. It is enough to say, that when I had the honour of seeing two ladies safe home last night, after pulling them out of the flood—as they both maintained, though never in it—no little gratitude had been expressed, and much good-will had been felt all round. And it would have been hard

upon that state of things, if any "Good-bye" had been said for ever.

For my part, although I had no great fear of being knocked on the head by Sam Henderson, it might have seemed haughty and even unfeeling, if I had insisted too strongly upon my ability to take care of myself. Therefore I allowed them to consider me in peril; and to this I was partly indebted perhaps for the opportunity of meeting them on Monday. It is true that I had not learned half as much, about matters of the deepest interest to me, as Mrs. Cutthumb, without any claim to such knowledge, was now possessed of; but this might fairly be expected, for women have always been convinced that men have no right to know half as much as themselves. "Let him find it out, I am not going to tell him," is their too frequent attitude, while they feel it a duty to their own sex to pour out almost everything.

However, I have no desire to complain, and perhaps it is better thus; for if we knew all of their affairs, we might think less about them. And I was in a very deep condition of interest and wonder, not only from the hints I had received, but also from the manifold additions

of my fancy. In fact, it was far more than I could do, to confine my heart to its proper work, when I saw those two ladies come to do a little shopping.

At that time, there were only about a dozen of the houses, in the narrow street that runs along the river, which allowed the importance of selling to compete with the necessity of dwelling. And the few, that did appear inclined to do a little trade, if coaxed into it, were half ashamed of their late concession to the spirit of the age. No man had yet appeared who shatters the ancestral sense of congruity, who routs up the natives, as a terrier bullies mastiffs, and scarcely even leaves them their own bones. And it may be maintained, that people got things better, and found them last longer than they ever do now. And this was only natural, because it always took a much longer time to buy them.

This enabled me to take my time about my own business, without any risk of being left behind by the lady housekeeper and her fair companion. From time to time I assured myself by a glance between flower-pots, or among drapery, that my quest was not gone astray, that as yet I had not lost all that I cared to see,

and that I could keep in my own background, while thinking of things far beyond me.

It never had been my manner yet to be much afraid of anything; not that I stood at all upon my valour, but simply because, to the best of my knowledge, I had no enemy anywhere. Yet now, very much to my own surprise, instead of proper courage, I was full of little doubts, and more misgivings than I can at all describe, and even a tendency to run away, and try to forget the very thing I was longing for. And I knew for a certainty that if the matter came to the very best opportunity, I was quite sure to do my very worst, and cut a despicable figure, to my own undoing.

I tried to recover myself, by doing a few strokes of business on my own account, going into the butcher's, and complaining sadly that he now weighed the foot in with the leg of mutton —a privilege only to be claimed by lamb—but he said that it now was ordained by nature, and asked how I expected a poor sheep to walk. I knew that his logic would not go upon all-fours, but my wits were so loose that I let it pass; and at that very moment I discovered, betwixt the hearts of two bullocks, something very near my own. Miss Kitty Fairthorn had

been set free by Mrs. Jenny Marker, while the housekeeper was driving a bargain in soft goods, unfit for young comprehension. After that, she was to go on for a talk with Widow Cutthumb, and meanwhile the young lady might look at the river, which was now rolling grandly in turbulent flood.

It was rather a shy and a delicate thing for me to go also in that direction; and the butcher (who never confined his attention to his own mutton) was as sure as could be to come out of his door, and look all up the lane. For Sunbury people, as long as I have known them, take a deep interest in one another's doings; and all the more so, when they happen to perceive that their sympathy is not requested. Wherefore I hurried back to ask another question, as if there were nothing in my mind but meat, and then turned up an alley, which would lead me round the back of some houses to the Halliford road further on.

There were many things now that I might have done, more sensible haply than what I did. I might have gone home, and had bread and cheese, and a glass of mild ale with Uncle Corny; or if that had seemed a little too ignoble, why not wander along the upper road,

and thence survey, as from a terrace—which used to be the origin of the word "contemplate"—the many distant mazes of the flooded river, the trees along the margin bowing over their foundations, the weak smile of autumnal sunshine over the wrongs of its own neglect, and perhaps in the foreground a slender figure, standing as if it were nothing in the mass?

However what I did was to go straight on towards the one in the world who was all the world to me. By what process of reason, or unreason, or pure stupid heart, I was come in such haste to this state of mind, is more than I can explain to any, and I did not even try to explain it to myself. There was my condition, right or wrong; and those who cannot understand it may be proud of their cool wisdom; and I without harm may be sorry for them.

She wore a gray cloak looking wonderfully simple, yet gathered in small at her beautiful waist, and trimmed at the skirts, and over two little pockets, with a soft blue fur called Vicunha. And she carried a little muff of the same material, and the strings of her hat (which was like a sea-shell) were also of a blue tint very sweetly matching. But the blue that was sweetest and richest of all was that of her large

soft loving eyes, than which it is impossible for any poet to imagine anything in heaven more lovely.

However I shall not go on any more about her, though things may slip out unawares; and without being rude, I may say plainly, that I have a right to keep such matters to myself. For a short time, I was at a loss for the commonest presence of mind, and stood wondering; hoping that she would turn round, and yet fearing that she might think I had no business there. Her whole attention was taken up, as I knew by her attitude—for already I seemed to have a gift of understanding her—not with any thought of people near her, but with the grandeur of the rolling flood, and the breadth of quiet lake beyond it. She was saying to herself—so far as I could tell—"What is the use of such a little dot as I am, and what is the value of my little troubles, when the mighty world goes on like this, and all I can do would not make a wrinkle and scarcely a flutter on the vast expanse?"

Then suddenly, as if in dread of her own thoughts, she turned round and saw me within a landyard of her. As if she had been taken in a rosy fog—for we are all ashamed of large

thoughts, when caught in them—she coloured to the tint of one of Uncle Corny's peaches, though without any of the spots he was so proud of; and then she drew one hand from her blue muff, and I found it so soft and warm and precious, that I almost forgot to let it go again.

"Oh, how I am surprised to see you here!" she said, as if my general place of residence was the moon; and probably I looked as if it should be so.

"And I am even more amazed to see you here," I answered without any of my wits to help me, "but I came to do a little bit of business with the butcher. He has been doing things he had no right to do."

"I have often been told that they are inclined to take advantage," she replied, with a look which convinced me at once that she would make a first-rate housekeeper, for what butcher could resist it? "My dear father would have much trouble with them, if, if—I mean if he were at all allowed to have it. But he is always so full of great things."

"Oh, what a happy man he must be! I have heard that he is the most clever, and learned, and one of the most celebrated men in London."

I may not have heard all that, but still I was

perfectly justified in saying it, for it made her talk; and every time she spoke, her voice sounded sweeter than it did the time before.

"You have been told the truth; it is acknowledged universally," she went on as if there were no fame to equal his, and with a sparkle in her blue eyes, as if a star had flashed in heaven; "there seems to be nothing that he does not know, and nothing that he does not improve by his knowledge, and make useful for —I mean for the world at large. How I can be his child, and yet so stupid and slow-witted, is a thing that amazes me, and I am trying always not to think of it."

"I am sure you are not stupid. I am sure you are very quick-witted. I never saw any one half so clever, and accomplished, and ladylike, and gentle, and"—"lovely" was the word I was about to use; but she stopped me, with a smile that would have stopped a rushing bull.

"I am showing my quick wits now," she said, presenting the charm of her hand again, "by never even thanking you for all you did last evening. I was thinking before you appeared, that but for you I should probably be tossing in these wild waters now, or probably carried down as far as London Bridge, without a chance even

of being buried. And it made me so sad, when I remembered that it would make no difference to any one."

"How can you say such a dreadful thing?" I exclaimed with great indignation, for her eyes that had been so full of light were darkened with sadness, and turned away; "it is not true that I saved you in the least, though I wish that I had; I should deserve to live for ever; but you speak as if no one in the world had any love for the sweetest, and best, and most lovely creature in it."

This was going rather far, I must confess; not that any word of it was at all exaggerated, or even approached the proper mark; but that it might seem a little early, on the part of one who had never had the pleasure of beholding the lady, till the previous afternoon. The remembrance of this was very awkward to me, and I was wild with myself, but could not stop the mischief now.

"Will you oblige me, Mr. Orchardson," she asked, as gently as if I had shown no folly, "by just looking down or up the village, to see if Mrs. Marker is coming. She was to have been here ten minutes ago; and we have to make a long round now, since the bridge on the lower

road is washed away. I ought not to trouble you; but I never know exactly where I am in country places, although I love the country so."

This was more than I deserved; for a good box on the ears was the proper reward for my frowardness, and I should have been less abashed by it. "I am a bigger cad than Sam Henderson himself," I whispered with a timid glance at her. But she seemed at a loss to know what my meaning was; and so with a deep but very clumsy bow, I departed to do her bidding.

Before I had taken many steps, there appeared the lady housekeeper in the distance, walking with great dignity, perhaps to console herself for the insolence of that Widow Cutthumb. Of this I knew nothing as yet, though it was plain that something unrighteous had disturbed her. And this made my humble demeanour more soothing and persuasive to her upright mind. After shaking her hand very warmly and paying a well-deserved compliment to her fine colour, I ventured to implore a little favour, which the sight of our garden wall sparkling in the sunshine, for it was newly topped with broken glass, suggested by some good luck to me.

"Oh, if you would only come," I said, "and

see my Uncle's trees to-morrow! They are at their very best this week, before we begin to gather largely. The pears are hanging down, so that we have had to prop the branches, and the plums are as thick as eggs together, when the hen is sitting; only instead of being pale, some are of the richest gold, and some of a deep purple, like—like that magnificent amethyst you wear; and the peaches on the wall—you might almost compare these to a lady's cheeks, when a gentleman tells her of her beauty——"

"Really, Mr. Orchardson, you are quite a poet!"

"And when you get tired of looking at them, and tasting the ripest, all you have to do is to come into the vinery, and sit beneath the leaves, and look all along it, wherever the clusters leave any room to look, until you don't know which you like the best, the appearance of the black or the white ones, because so much depends upon the light. And then Uncle Corny comes with a pair of scissors, and says—'Ma'am, that is not the way to look at it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating,' and he hands you in a vine-leaf, being careful where he cuts it, a jet-black shoulder of Black Hamburgh, and an amber-coloured triplet of White Muscat."

"Mr. Orchardson, you are making my mouth water; if a vulgar expression may be allowed to one who eats the bread of servitude." I wondered to hear her speak thus, though I saw that she had been aggrieved by somebody. "And if you will be at home to-morrow afternoon, perhaps I might obtain permission to leave my mistress, for an hour or two. I might walk down about four o'clock, when I have finished all the blacking of the boots."

Something with a spiteful tang to it was rankling in her mind, as I perceived; but having no right to ask, I just lifted my hat, and gazed at her gold chain and brooch. Then a tear or two, started by her own words, came forth, and she looked at me softly.

"You would add to the favour of your invitation," she said with a smile which made me look at something else, "if you would include in it Miss Kitty Fairthorn. Poor thing! She is put upon very sadly; and it would be such a treat for her. They see so little of the beauties of nature in London."

"I am sure my Uncle will be most happy;" I answered as if I were not sure about myself.

CHAPTER VII.

DE GUSTIBUS.

Now my Uncle Cornelius Orchardson (a stout and calm fruit-grower, called in contumely "Corny the topper" by strangers who wanted his growth for nothing) professed and even practised a large contempt for gossip. Nevertheless it was plain enough that his feelings were hurt, if a thing went on, which he was bound in politeness to know, and yet was not offered any tidings of it. With such people it is always wiser, if you have done anything against their wishes, to let them know all the particulars at once; and so to have it out and be done with it. And I was beginning to love him now, which as a boy I had done but little, inasmuch as he never gave way to me. Obstinate as he was, and sometimes hot—if one tried to play tricks with him—I was not much afraid of Uncle Corny, although so dependent upon

him. For I knew him to be a just man in the main, and one who kept no magnet of his own to fetch down the balance to his own desires. Yea, rather he would set the beam against himself, when it trembled in doubt of its duty.

With the hasty conclusions of youth, I believed that because he was now an old bachelor, though able to afford a wife many years ago, he had taken and held to an adverse view of the fairer and better half of the human race. And his frequent counsels to me to keep out of their way confirmed my conviction. The course of time proved that I was wrong in this, as in many other matters of my judgment; and my rule, if I had to begin again, would be to think the best of every man, till he compels me otherwise. But the worst of Uncle Corny was that he never cared to vindicate himself.

His countenance also was in keeping with this manner, and the build of his body, and the habit of his gait. His figure was tall, yet wide and thick, and his face very solid and ample. He had never been comely by line and rule, yet always very pleasant for an honest man to look at, and likely to win the good word of a woman. Because there was strength and decision in his face, and a power of giving full meaning to his

words, which were generally short and to the purpose. And especially he was gifted with a very solid nose, not of any Roman or Grecian cast, but broadly English, and expansive, and expressive, and sometimes even waggish when he told an ancient tale.

Knowing that he would be quite sure to hear of my adventures soon, even if he had not heard already—for Sunbury is a fine place for talk—and trusting to his better feelings (which were always uppermost after a solid supper, when he stirred his glass of hot rum and water, and had his long pipe lit for him), I began upon him that very night with what my mind was full of. For Tabby Tapscott was now gone home, after looking at me rather queerly.

"What a knowledge of the world you have, Uncle Corny!" I exclaimed at the end of his favourite tale concerning Covent Garden; "your advice must be worth more than the counsel of the cleverest lawyer in London."

"More honest at least, and no fee to pay," he answered rather testily, for he hated all humbug and compliments. "What have you been at, young man? Is it my advice, or my aid, you want?"

"A little of both; or a lot of one, and a little

of the other. I have made the acquaintance of a sweet young lady, the gentlest, and loveliest, and most graceful, and modest, and elegant, and accomplished, and lofty-minded, and noble-hearted, and—and——"

"Angelic, angelic is the word, Kit—don't begrudge it; it saves such a lot of the others."

"Yes, angelic," I replied with firmness; "and even that is not half good enough. You know nothing of such matters, Uncle Corny."

"Then what is the use of my advice? You had better go to Tabby Tapscott."

This threw me out a little; but I would not be brow-beaten.

"If you have no wish to hear any more about her, and compare her to an old creature like Tabby, all I can say is that I am sorry for your taste, very sorry for your taste, Uncle Corny."

"Well, well, go on, Kit. Let us have it all, while we are about it. Rasp the baker told me something. He has brought down a girl from London, who can make short bread, and maids of honour. No wonder you fell in love with her."

"You may try to provoke me, but you shall not succeed; because you know no better.

What will you say, when I tell you the young lady is the niece of Miss Coldpepper of Coldpepper Manor?"

I looked at Uncle Corny with a glance of triumph; and then stood up, to breathe again, after my own audacity. But instead of being terrified, he took it very coolly.

"Well, a cat may look at a king," said he, pursuing his pipe with his usual discretion; "and I suppose you have only looked at her; though somebody said you pulled her out of our watercress brook."

"Sir, I have had two delightful talks with her; and I mean to have another to-morrow. Not that I have any hope—of course, I am well aware——"

"That you are unworthy to worship her shoe-string, and lie down for her peg-heels to tread on. If she likes you, I don't see why you shouldn't have her. By and by, I mean, when you get a little wiser. But has the girl got any money?"

"I hope not; I hope not, from the bottom of my heart. It would be yet another obstacle. She is as high above me, as the heaven is above the earth, without—without even a penny in her pockets."

"Flies all the higher, because her pockets are so light." He spoke with a jocosity, which appeared to me most vulgar. "Don't look as if you longed to knock me over, Kit. By the way, I heard that you had floored Sam Henderson. If so, you deserve the best maid that ever looked into a looking-glass. What do you want me to do, my lad? I know a little of those people."

I wondered what people he meant, but feared to ask him for the moment, lest I might lose the chance of getting the favour I had set my heart on. "It is a very simple thing," I said, "and need not take your time up. Mrs. Marker is longing to see your garden; and if she may come to-morrow afternoon, she will bring the young lady, and I can show them round. You need not stir a step, or even turn your head."

"It is quite enough to have one head turned. They may come, if they choose, but they must not bother me. Hand me the jar of tobacco, Kit, and be off to the books, instead of spooning."

My Uncle might easily have taken a more ample and cordial view of the question; still I was pleased not to find him worse, and ordered our crock-boy on the Tuesday morning to fetch a little round while he ate his breakfast,

and leave a note for Mrs. Marker at the lodge of the Coldpepper grounds, near the dairy, which the housekeeper visited early. And then I went to gather and basket a quarter of Keswick codlin and Quarantines. This occupied all the forenoon, and what with seeing that they were picked aright, and sorted into firsts and seconds, and fairly packed, with no rubbish at the bottom, into bushel-baskets, and yet presented smiling with their eyes upward to meet the gaze of the purchaser, the day went so fast that it was dinner-time, before I could sit down, and dwell upon my heart. Then at a reproachful glance from Selsey Bill, our orchard foreman, who had heard the church-clock strike one, and felt it to the depths of his capable stomach, I set three fingers to my teeth, and blew the signal. which is so welcome to the men who have lived upon nothing but hope, ever since half-past eight o'clock.

It is not to be denied however that I had taken pretty sharp advantage of being well mounted from time to time on the upper rungs of a ladder, which gave me command of the Halliford road—the higher road, I mean, for the lower now was stopped except to carts and carriages—in such a manner that none

could come from that part of the world, without my knowledge. Seeing only a pedlar and some few women (highly interesting to themselves no doubt, but not concerning my state of mind) I went in to dine with Uncle Corny, and took care to eat none of his onions.

"What cheeks you have got, Kit!" he cried with a laugh; "and it is not from eating too much dinner. You have stolen the colour of my Quarantines. Eat, boy, eat; or how will you pull through it? No more visits from young ladies, if you are to go off your head like this. You have put the new mustard-spoon into the salt. A pretty muddle, I'm afraid, among my apples."

Being always very dutiful, I let him have his grumble; and presently he lit his pipe, and made off for the packing-shed, though the load was not going till to-morrow night. Then I put myself into a little better trim, feeling that the best I did could never make me fit to look round the corner of a wall at somebody. Although I was considered in our village a smart and tidy and well-built young fellow, and one of the girls at the linen-draper's had sent me a Valentine last spring, said to be of her own composition, beginning — "Thou noble and

majestic youth, Thy curls and thy ruddy cheeks proclaim the truth, That whenever I think of thee, I heave a sigh, And if thou provest false, I shall jump into the Thames and die!" But it was in vain for me to think of this at present; it gave me no support at all worth having; and even a book of poetry, which I put into my pocket, might just as well have been the list of pots and pans from Turnham Green.

Before I could get into any real courage, then came a gentle double knock, as if from the handle of a parasol, at the green door near the corner of the wall, and then a little laugh; and then a sweet voice said, "Oh, Jenny, don't you think we had better go back? Are you sure that Auntie said that I might come?" In dread of further doubts, I ran up promptly, and opened the door, and brought them in, and locked it.

"This young lady," began Mrs. Marker, as if they were come for her sake only, "has never seen any fruit-garden, fruit-orchard, fruit-establishment, or whatever the proper name is. And I thought perhaps before she goes back to London, this would enlarge her store of knowledge; and her father, who is a

very learned man, might like to hear her account of it. Now keep your eyes open, Miss Kitty, and see all. You would fancy that she noticed nothing, Mr. Orchardson, by the way she goes on, and her quietness. And yet when you come to talk afterwards, it turns out that nothing has escaped her blue eyes; and she can tell ten times as much as I can, and I am considered pretty accurate too. But we must pay our respects to your Uncle, Mr. Cornelius Orchardson. I always like to do the proper thing. Business first, and pleasure afterwards."

"He will smile, when he hears how you have put it. He is very busy now at the packing-shed. But he told me to take you wherever you liked; and he will come down, when he has made out his list. On the left you have the peach-wall, and on the right the plums; and the figs are getting very ripe down this alley. We very seldom eat much fruit ourselves, because we have such a lot of it. But we always long to get ladies' opinions, because of the delicacy of their taste."

"It is a perfect shame," said Miss Marker, while making up her mind what to begin with, "that, in such a Paradise, there should be no

lady, to give you the knowledge of good and evil. I brought a silver knife with me, in case of being tempted. Not that I mean to taste anything of course, unless my opinion should be absolutely required. My constitution is not strong, Mr. Kit; and I am compelled to be very careful."

I knew what was meant by that, having heard it often. "You shall have nothing, madam, but the very best," I answered; "for we never throw away an opportunity like this. What shall we offer first for your judgment?"

"Kitty, what do you say?" She turned as if in doubt. "You know, my dear, how careful we must be. This young lady, Mr. Kit, allows me to call her 'Kitty,' in our private moments. Kit and Kitty — what a very strange coincidence!"

I could not help looking at the beautiful Miss Fairthorn; and to my eyes she became more beautiful than ever. For a deep blush spread upon her lovely cheeks, and she turned away, and said, "I leave it quite to you."

If Mrs. Marker had been planning all the morning how to get the best of the tasting to herself, and to render her judgment supreme, she could hardly have hit upon a better device

than this. For her young companion became so nervous and so much confused, and I myself so diffident and deeply occupied, that our only object was to fill the lady housekeeper's mouth, and keep it running over with nothing worse than fruit. Now and then I ventured to steal a glance at the one with whom my heart was filled, as if to ask whether she would ever forgive me for my sad name of Kit. But her eyes were afraid to encounter mine; or if by any chance they did so, the light that was in them wavered like a timid gleam pursued by cloud. To relieve this trouble, I began to chatter vague nonsense to the other visitor, who was falling to in earnest.

"Everything is out of time this year, and nothing up to character. There has been no sunshine on this wall, until you ladies shone upon it; and what amazes me most is to find that anything has any colour at all. Here is a Grosse Mignonne now, a week ago as green as a leek, and covered now with downy crimson, except just where a leaf has made a pale curve across it, like the pressure of a finger on your cheek. Taste it, Mrs. Marker; you are not getting on at all."

"Let me see, that makes seven, I think. I

shall have lost my taste before we get among the gages. Thank you, I am sure. Oh, how lovely, and delicious! Luscious perhaps is the better expression. There goes ever so much more juice on my dress. I ought to have brought a bib, Mr. Kit; and I will, if I ever come again. But would not you say it was just the least thought woolly?" She had never heard of such a thing before, but I had taught her, and she was growing critical. "Kitty dear, you are tasting nothing. Don't you consider that just an atom woolly?"

"Very likely it is. I don't know enough to say. But I never remember tasting wool, with so fine a flavour in it."

Perhaps I was not in a proper mood to judge; but verily this appeared to me to show an inborn aptitude for taking the management of the fruit, and the government of the grower. To exaggerate is altogether out of my nature, and I find it a great mistake to be ecstatic; but in spite of all that, I would have given every sixpence allowed me by my Uncle Corny—who was always afraid of allowing me too much—if only I could have conveyed to this exquisite judge my opinion of her sentence. But that blessed discovery of Mrs. Marker's about the

everlasting fitness of our names,—upon which I had been dwelling in my heart, long before her stupid slowness blurted it—this, I say, had acted in a very awkward manner upon a mind infinitely higher than hers; and yet I hoped humbly that it might suggest something, which might be for the best, if let alone.

Things being so, it was not at all amiss that a loud voice reached us from the clipped yew-hedge, which was set across to break the north winds here—"Kit, where the deuce are you gone mooning? I thought you would have come up with the ladies, long ago."

"Here we are, looking from a distance at your peaches. Oh, Mr. Orchardson, how lovely they do seem!" Mrs. Marker lost her dignity by giving me a wink, believing as she did—and many others thought the same—that I was next to nobody in these gardens, and my Uncle a tiger over every fruit he grew.

"We have had as many peaches as we can eat, sir," I said, without any wish to contradict her, but simply to show the position I held.

"Ladies will excuse my present plight;" he had no coat on, and his sleeves were tucked up, showing a pair of thick brown arms. "My peaches are very poor this year, and many

have split their stones, and rot instead of ripening. We have not had such a season since 1852. I hope you will not judge us by the wretched things you see. But come on a little further, and try something else. All fruit is water, such a year as we have had. But possibly I may find a plum or two worth eating."

"Allow me the pleasure, sir," said Mrs. Marker, who always insisted on proper forms, "of introducing you to Miss Fairthorn, the only daughter of Captain, or as he now is considered, Professor Fairthorn—a gentleman of the highest scientific tendencies."

"To be sure," said Uncle Corny, as he took his hat off, and smiled with surprise at her beauty; "I knew Captain Fairthorn, years ago, and a very noble man he is. I have very good cause to remember him—but I will not trouble you with that now. Mrs. Marker, if you would just turn this corner—take care of your most becoming bonnet, young lady"—this pleased the good housekeeper more than twenty plums, "our trees are not as sensitive as we are."

His urbanity amazed me, for I never could have thought a good man could be so inconsistent; and I said to myself that after all there is something irresistible in women. So

I ventured to sidle up to Miss Fairthorn, as he led the way with his convoy, and asked her what she thought of him.

"Oh, I think he is so nice," she replied smiling at me, as if she was pleased with my question; "so upright, and manly, and such a fine countenance. No wonder, I'm sure, that his fruit is good."

"Did you notice how much he was surprised at you, at your very pretty dress, and exceedingly sweet smile, and most ladylike appearance, and silvery voice, and lovely—lovely way of holding your parasol?"

"How can you talk such nonsense, Mr. Orchardson? And your Uncle appears such a sensible man! Dear me, we are losing all the wise things he can say. Let us hurry on—it was this way, I think."

"No, no! Don't you hear their voices down this path? Not twenty yards off, if it were not for these trees. Oh, do let me carry your parasol. You will want both hands to get along. Before you know where we are, we shall be in the broad road. Oh, I am so sorry—it was all my fault. You must let me undo the mischief I have done. May I show you how well I understand all roses?"

By good luck, combined with some little skill of mine, her simple yet wholly adorable frock was captured in three places by gooseberries whom I envied. I expected great delight from this. But she showed at once the sweetness of her temper, and her height above me. Instead of blushing stupidly, she smiled, and said—"Thank you, I will do it for myself. You can hardly be expected to understand such things."

CHAPTER VIII.

BAD COUNSEL.

THERE are very few things that have the power to please us both in heart and mind, even when they have the will to do it, which is very seldom. Great events in our lives flash by without a word, and scarcely seem to give us time to chuckle, or to sob, till afterwards. But the little turns of time are more indulgent, and pass us with a sauntering foot, more often dull than lightsome.

For the moment, I was glad to find that my Uncle Cornelius, in his plain way, had taken a liking to my love. But I gave him little credit for it, inasmuch as it seemed impossible to me that he could do otherwise. Such was my petty jealousy that I did not even want to hear him praise her, except in my own words. But he, in his solid way, would take his own view of her character—as if he knew anything about it!

"I don't care a farthing about all that," I cried, when he had spoken of some things, which tell the longest.

"I can see she is very quiet, and full of home affections," he persisted, as if I were a boy at school, and he were holding the spelling-book; "she is not extravagant, nor fond of waste; that I saw by the way she went through a 'Huling's Superb,' with a hole in it. I could scarcely have done it any better myself. And she was really grieved, which the lady-housekeeper had not the sense to be, by the freedom —she called it recklessness—with which I picked those Jeffersons, to find one in tip-top condition. And then, when I offered to make some tea, the housekeeper who had been stuffing for hours only asked if the water was boiling. But your sweetheart began to buckle up, and asked who could touch tea, after such delicious things."

"Buckle up, indeed! Uncle Corny, you are outrageous. She had got no such thing as a buckle near her. Her waist is done round with a narrow blue ribbon, the colour of the sky, as her eyes are. And I will thank you not to call her my sweetheart, if you please. I shall never have such luck. And it sounds so common. There ought to be a better expression

for it. And such things are not made to be talked of."

"Very well! You won't hear me say another word. It will all come to nothing; that's one comfort. She goes back to London on Friday; and you will very soon console yourself with Rasp's young woman. I am told that she has fine black eyes; and I am not sure that black don't beat blue ones, after all."

This was so disgusting that I went away, and worked till dusk at a heavy piece of trenching; and when it was dusk I lay in wait for three felonious boys who came from Hampton, almost every evening, prowling for our apples. I caught all three, and trounced them well—which is the only proper plan—and the sound of their wailings, as they went home, restored my faith in justice. For I had given them their choice—"a licking, or a summons"—and they said very justly, "Oh, a licking, if you please, sir." The world has now come to such a pass, that a father would summon me for assault, if I so discharged his duty for him; but thirty years ago a bit of common sense survived.

But in spite of that little satisfaction, I could not get much sleep that night, for rolling, and pondering, and twisting in and out, the tangle

and the burden of a troubled mind. Turn it as I might, there was no opening through it for another view of that perfect creature, with whom my whole life seemed to flow. Terrible, terrible was the truth that she would leave us all on Friday, and be swallowed up and no more seen, in that great earthquake, London. A thousand wild ideas, and schemes, for stealing yet one more interview, and countless crazy hopes that she herself might try to compass it, all came thrilling through my restless brain, but not one would stop there. None had any shape or substance, such as could be worked upon, and brought to likelihood of success. This was Tuesday night; last Saturday night how different everything had been! Then I had only cared to know, that things in the ground were doing well, that all the fruit which required gathering got its due, and looked its best on its way to be devoured, that every man pocketed his wages in good time to spend them, and that there was a little hope of the weather taking up at last. Now there had been three days without rain, and with touch of autumnal sunshine; heaven began to look bright again, and the earth (which, like the dwellers therein, lives only aright in view of it) was beginning

to lift her sodden crust, and fetch once more her storm-trampled breath, and issue anew the genial green in the midrib of mouldy foliage. In a word, the summer which had failed the year, for want of a smile to lead it, was breaking out at this last moment, better late than never.

Possessed as I was with my own troubles, and only a flickering sunshine, I could not resist the contagious lightness of cheerful faces all around. The workmen, who do (in spite of all British reserve, and manly selfishness) take a deep interest in their employer's welfare, and stand up for him bravely, when any one abuses him, except themselves—every man of them laid heel to spade, or hoisted ladder on shoulder, with new briskness; because they could say to one another—"The old buffer, who carries on this place, has fought against long odds like a man; and now things look as if they was taking a little turn in his favour."

On the Wednesday morning glum however was my mind, and grim my face, and Uncle Corny made some jokes, which may have seemed very good to him. Our breakfast things were set as usual, and our breakfast cooked and served by Mrs. Tabby Tapscott, that sage widow from the village, whom we were often pleased to

laugh at for her Devonshire dialect. Also for her firm conviction, that nothing in these outlandish parts, and none of our biggest men, were fit to compare with the products of the West. There was one point however on which we gladly confessed the truth that was in her—she could fry potatoes, not leathery chips, nor the cake of pulpy fatness, but the crisp yet melting patin of brown gold, so as none of the East may fry them. She turned them out of the frying-pan upon a willow-pattern plate, and the man deserved to wear the willow, who could think of weeping near them.

Now this good woman, who was a "cure," as the slang boys of our village said, took (though I knew it not as yet) a tender interest in my affairs. For the last day or two, I had observed that she glanced at me rather strangely, and once or twice behind my Uncle's back, she had put her finger on her lips, and then jerked her thumb over her shoulder, as if to say—"Come and have a quiet word with me."

But my frame of mind had appeared to me too noble and exalted to be shared with her, until it was come to such a pitch that any aid would be welcome.

This morning, as half of her fine work re-

mained on my plate neglected, she could no longer contain herself, but pinched my sleeve and whispered, while my Uncle was going to the window, "Come out in gearden, I want to spake to 'e."

"Speak away," I answered, "there is nothing to stop you, Mrs. Tapscott;" but she looked at me and muttered that I was just a fool, and she had a mind to have nought to do with me.

By the common law of nature, this made me long to hear what on earth she could have to say, and I gave her the chance, while she washed up the things, to see where I was, and to come out if she pleased. She might do exactly as she pleased, for I did not intend to encourage her. She came out, and began without asking me.

"I can't abide to zee 'e look so crule weist and peaky. The toorn of your nose bain't the zame as her was, and you don't zim at home with your vittels, Measter Kit. Lor' bless 'e, I been droo the zame my zen, and I knaws arl about 'en."

At first I was inclined to walk away; but it would have been shabby to be rude to her, and a look of good-will and kindly pity was in

her hard-worn eyes and face. "What can you have to say to me?" I asked.

"You be young, and I be old," she took my coat to stop me; "you be peart and nimble, and I be a'most crippled with rheumatics and rumbago. But the Lord hath made us arl alike, though He have given us different. I knows as wull what ails 'e now, as if it arl coom droo my own heart. And what you be zaying to yourzelf is—'How be I to goo on with it?'"

This was a wonderfully accurate description of my present state of mind. I looked at Mrs. Tapscott, with the admiration she deserved, and said—"Well then, how be I to goo on with it?"

"I've athought 'un out," she made answer bravely; "what you be bound to do, Measter Kit, is never to let she goo back to Lunnon, wi'out zettling zummat."

Here was the whole of it in a nutshell. But how was I to settle anything?

"Oh, Tabby, dear Tabby," I cried, with some loss of dignity, but much gain of truth; "how can I even get the chance of saying a word to her again? This is Wednesday, and she goes back on Friday, and perhaps she never comes again, and there are millions of people between

us. Everybody knows what Miss Coldpepper is, as proud as Punch, and as stiff as starch. If I even dared to go near the house, she'd just tell the gamekeeper to shoot me."

"Wull, a young man as have vallen in love must take his chance of shot-guns. But if so be you latts her goo awai wi'out so much as anoother ward, you desarves to have no tongue in the head of 'e."

"How easy it is to talk!" I replied, making ready to leave her, and think by myself. "But how hard and impossible, Tabby, to find any chance of doing anything. I must make up my mind not to see her any more; but to think of her always, as long as I live."

"Boddledicks!" cried Mrs. Tapscott, her favourite interjection of contempt—what it meant we knew not, and probably not she. "Boddledicks, where be the brains of they men? I could tull 'e what to do in half a zecond, lad, to vetch old Coldpepper, and the young leddy too, and every mortial 'ooman in thic there ouze, to hurn arter 'e, the zame as if they zighted 'e a-hurning to the muckpit, with all their Zunday vainery under thee arm."

I looked at Tabby Tapscott with some surprise; for she was giving greater force to her

description, by using leg and arm as if she bore a share in all of it. And the vigour of her countenance made me smile. But the old woman laughed with a superior air. "Tak'th a bit o' time, for volks with slow brains to vollow my maind up—don't her now? Goo up to 'ouze, young man, and stale old Ragless."

"Steal old Regulus!" I cried in great amazement, "why, what good on earth would that do me? And if it would do any good, how am I to manage it? I have not been brought up to that profession."

"I zeed a man to Barrinarbor, vaive and vorty year agone, the most wonnerful cliver chap, I ever zee. He coom a-coortin' of me, the taime as I wor ruckoned the purtiest maid in arl the parish of Westdown. But I wadn't have none of 'un, because a' wor so tricksy. Howsomever I didn't zay 'noo' to wance, for a' wor the most wonnerful chap I ever zee. The Lord had been and given he every zort o' counsel. A' could churm a harse out of any vield or linhay, a' could mak' the coos hurn to 'un, when the calves was zuckin', a' could vetch any dog a' took a vancy to from atwane his owner's legs or from's own zupper. And a' zhowed me a trick or two I han't vorgotten yet. I could

tull 'e purty smart how to vetch old Ragless, and kape 'un so long as you was mainded."

Now I might have paid little attention to this, and indeed had begun to reject the suggestion of a stratagem far below the dignity of love, till suddenly a queer dream came to my remembrance, a dream of last Sunday night, the very night after that little adventure at the timber-bridge. In that enchanting vision, I had seen Miss Fairthorn smiling as she came to me, through a lovely meadow enamelled with primrose, and cowslip, and bluebell, herself of course the fairest of all the flowers. And when I approached her, behold, she was led by this same dog, old Regulus, who conducted her gracefully to my longing arms, by means of the long gold chain which had reposed on the stately bosom of Mrs. Jenny Marker. I am not superstitious—as everybody vows when recounting his dreams—but still it did seem strange.

"Lave it arl to me," Mrs. Tapscott went on, as she saw my hesitation. "Nort for e' to do, but to gie me a zhillin', vor to buy the stuff, and nobody no wiser. Then goo avore zunrise, and vetch old Ragless. Putt 'un in a barg, and keep 'un znug in thic there old root-ouze. My stars and garters, what a bit o' vun 'twill be!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DOG VIOLATE.

A GREAT observer of these latter days has advised us to abstain from deep research into the origin of our own names. Otherwise we might become convinced of a lamentable want of lofty tone among those, without whom we could not have been here, to show our superiority. A vein of fine thought is at once set flowing; but for "Ragless" it would have flowed in vain, as dogs have no surname to dwell upon.

His case was a strange one, and not without interest. Nobody in our parish had any knowledge of his ancestry, although he had won very high repute by biting many people who got over it. Any other dog would have become the victim of an injudicious outcry; but "Ragless," by making some other good bites, established his legal right to do it, and was now considered a very wholesome dog, though he

might have a temper of his own. But even if he had, who was to blame?

Some seven, or it may have been eight years since, Miss Coldpepper was "rolling in her carriage" down Feltham hill, when the coachman pulled up very sharply, and just in time to save mishap. All the boys in the village were let loose from school, and with one accord had found a genial pastime, which they were pursuing with the vigour of our race. They had got a poor dog, with no father, or mother, or even policeman to defend him, and they had put him in a barrel near a garden-gate, and tacked in the head so that no escape was left. This being done to their entire satisfaction, what remained except to roll him down the hill? And this they were doing with a lofty sense of pleasure, and shouts that almost drowned the smothered howls from within, when the carriage came upon them, and very nearly served them right. "Let them have the whip," cried the lady with due feeling, when the footman had jumped down and reported all the facts; but the ringleaders had vanished, and the boys who tasted lash were some innocent little ones who had only helped in shouting. "Hand him in to me," was her next order; and the poor

trembling animal saw pity in her eyes, and gave her face a timid lick, which made his fortune. No claimant being found for him the lady took him home, and aptly called him "Regulus," which the servants very promptly converted into "Ragless," reasoning well that the Italian greyhound wore a coat, but this dog had none, save the bristles wherewith Nature had endowed him. In the course of time he superseded every other dog, and probably every human being, in the affection of Miss Coldpepper.

If the early portion of his life had been unhappy, fortune had now made him ample amends, and he should have been in amity with all mankind. But whether from remembrance of his youthful woes, or cynical perception of our frailties and our frauds, Regulus never acquired that sweetness, which we look for in dogs, so much more than in ourselves. His standard of action was strict duty beyond doubt, but a duty too strictly limited, and confined to two persons—himself, and his mistress. With the rest of creation he was cheerfully at war, though tolerably neutral towards the cook, when she could bid high enough for his consideration. These things made him deeply respected.

In person however, he was not quite a dog to arouse any vast enthusiasm. He belonged to the order of the wiry-coated terriers, if he was a terrier at all; for in him all the elements were so duly mingled, that Nature could only proclaim him a dog. The colour of ginger and that of cinnamon were blended together in his outward dog; and he went on three legs, quite as often as on four, as much from contempt of the earth perhaps as from feelings of physical economy. There was nothing base about him; he had fine teeth, and he showed them, but never made insidious assault on anybody. When he meant to bite, he did it quickly, and expressed his satisfaction afterwards.

To seduce such a sentry, was an enterprise worthy of him, who in sweet love's service, and dispensing its mournful melodies, enchanted the son of Echidna. And it may have been this sense of difficulty, and a sporting desire to conquer it, which led me to follow up the joke, and try my hand at a job, which had beaten the deepest dog-stealers of Seven Dials.

All day long, I hoped to get at least a glimpse, or if bad luck would not allow that, to hear at any rate something of that young

lady, without whom my life must grow old and barren. For this was no school-boy affair of the fancy, nor even a light skit of early manhood, such as fifty young fellows have out of fifty-one, and go their way quickly after some other girl. I had never been given to such fugitive sport; I was now in the prime of my years almost, and though I might have looked at maidens, and thought what pretty things they were, none had ever touched my heart till now. And "touched" is by no means the proper word to use; it should be said plainly, that all my heart was occupied, and possessed to its deepest fibre by a being far better, and sweeter, and nobler than its outer and bodily owner; and that this must abide so to its very latest pulse; as you will truly find, if you care to hear about it.

Not a word came to me about those things which destroyed all my attention to any other; and the dusk had stopped work—which was my only comfort—and I sat all alone that Wednesday evening, trying to get through a little bread and cheese, but glancing more often from our old window at the gloomy rush of the river, which was still in high flood though some little abated. Uncle Corny was gone, to try to get some money from people who had thriven on his

hard-won fruit, and Mrs. Tabby Tapscott had left the house early, upon some business of her own. The house-door was open, for we had not many rogues, till the railway came some years afterwards; and the evening was of those that smell of beehives, and cornstacks, and horses upon their way home. At last, when I had made up my mind to be forgotten by every one, in came Tabby, as bright as a bun.

"Oh fai, oh fai!" she cried; "whatever be 'e doing of? Atin' no zupper, and zittin' as if 'e was mazed a'most. Look 'e zee what the Lord hath zent 'e! I was vorced to go arl the way to Hampton for 'un, for vear of they long tongues to Zunbury. If this wun't vetch Measter Ragless, arl I can zay is her bain't a dog. Putt 'un down in zellar, when I've larned 'e how to use 'un."

From beneath her shawl she produced a little box, which she opened in triumph, and the room was filled at once with a very peculiar odour quite unknown to me. It was pungent rather than pleasant, and it made me sneeze as well as laugh.

"You be up there by vaive o'clock, when the daisies' eyes be openin', and goo to the zide door I tould 'e of"—Mrs. Tapscott knew all the

household ways at Coldpepper Hall, through a niece of hers who was kitchen-maid, "and vang this by the coord out o' heelin', wi'out titchin' of 'un with thy vingers, and drag 'un athort the grass and the pilm to backzide o' the zhrubbery, and then you step out o' zight in a lew cornder. Ould dog be put out at zix o'clock riglar, and 'tis liable he'll hurn straight to 'e. Then let 'un ate a hummick, and kitch 'un up vittily, and pop 'un into barg, and carr 'un home here, and I'll zhow 'e what to do with 'un. But mind as her don't scammel 'e. Her be turble itemy."

She gave me many other minute directions, and made me laugh so that my spirits rose, with the hope of an interesting little farce, to relieve the more tragic surroundings. I undertook briskly to play my part, looking on the matter as a harmless joke; though I came to think in course of time that the cruel theft I suffered from might partly be a just requital for this wicked robbery. And yet it was absurd and senseless, to make such comparison.

Without disturbing Uncle Corny, who slept very heavily, I was up before daylight on the Thursday morning, and set out with the box and bag on my felonious enterprise. Coldpepper Hall, or Manor, as it was called indiffer-

ently, stood back upon some rising ground at a distance from the river, and was sheltered well by growth of trees. There was nothing very grand about it, and it leaned on stucco more than stone; but there was plenty of room both within and without, and any one getting inside the doors might say to himself, with some comfort flowing into him—"I am sure that I need never be in any hurry here."

The sun meant to get up a little later on, when I jumped the palings of this old demesne, at a place where of right there should have been a footpath, but the owner of the Manor had stopped it long ago, perceiving the superior claims of quietude. Nobody had cared to make a fuss about it, but enough of ancestral right remained to justify me in getting over. Every window of the house was still asleep, and I gazed at it with humble reverence, not as the citadel of the Coldpeppers, but as the shrine of my sacred love. Then I chose a place of ambush in a nest of hollies, and approaching the sallyport of Regulus, drew a slow trail from it across the dewy grass to my lurking-place, and there waited calmly.

Sweet visions of love from the ivory gate now favoured me with their attendance, partly

perhaps because love had not allowed me to sleep out my sleep. Far as I am from any claim to the merits of a classical education, I had been for some years, off and on, as a day boy at Hampton Grammar-school, and could do a bit of Virgil pretty well, and an ode or two of Horace. Whenever Uncle Corny came across a Latin name he would call for me; and take it altogether, I had long been considered the most learned young man in Sunbury. Even now I remembered, though most of it was gone, the story of the Nymph who placed her son in ambuscade for Proteus, and the noble description of Regulus on parole, waving off the last kiss of his wife and babes. Grimly he set his manly visage on the ground; and my Regulus was doing the very same thing now.

Fat Charles had opened the door with a yawn, and sent forth that animal of Roman type, to snuff the morning air, and perform his toilet, and pay his orisons in general. Luxurious days had told their tale; it was too plain that Capua had corrupted Sabine simplicity. Regulus moved with a listless air, his desire to find whom he might bite lay dormant, and no sense of iniquity pricked his ears, or lifted the balance of his tail. "Let

the world wag," was the expression of his eyes, "I get whatever I want in it, and would wag to it also, if I were not too fat." It appeared too certain that if I meant to catch him, I should have to go and bag him where he stood.

But suddenly down went his nose, and his bristles flew up, and every line of his system grew stiff as wire. He had lit on my trail near a narrow flower-border, and it presented itself with a double aspect. Was it the ever-fresh memory of a cat—not a cat of everyday life of course, but a civet-cat, a musk-cat, a cat of poetic, or even fabulous perfume? Or was it the long-drawn sweetness of a new ambrosial food, heaven-sent to tempt his once lively, but now vainly wept-for appetite? Whatever it might be, the line of duty was marked, and beyond evasion.

Those of our race who have made a study of dogs, for the sake of example, declare that the best and most noble of them follow quest with their noses well up in the air. Regulus failed in this test of merit; he spread his nostrils affably within an inch of where the worms lay, pricked his hairy ears, which were of divers colours, and with the stump of his tail as the loftiest point of his person, ran a bee-

line towards me. In accordance with his fame, I made ready for a bite; but to my surprise he paused, when he came point-blank upon me, and seemed taken aback, as with some wholly new emotion. Regardful of the teaching of my Nymph, I offered him a portion of the magic sop, and while he was intent upon it slipped a stout potato-sack over his head, tumbled him in with a push in the rear, and shouldered him.

Taking the path across the fields, I got home without meeting any one, and found Tabby waiting for me near the root-house, which was simply the trunk of a grand old oak, with a slab of elm fitted as a door to it. No one was likely to visit this old storehouse at the present time of year, and the loudest wailing of the largest dog might be carried on in the strictest privacy. But I meant him to be happy there, and so he was—to some extent.

For he seemed to resign himself, as if recalling his early adventure in the barrel, and regarding his later prosperity as a dream; and probably the charm of the drug he had swallowed acted benignly upon his nerves. At any rate he allowed himself to be secured by a chain and a fold-pitcher, and even licked my hand instead of snarling and showing his teeth. Every

arrangement was made for his comfort, and he lay down as happy as a lotus-eater.

After breakfast, I took a little turn in the village, and there had the pleasure of seeing fat Charles, the Coldpepper footman, nearly trying to run, and looking sadly out of breath. He carried a leading strap, with no dog to it, and under his arm was a bundle of papers. As I approached him with kind enquiries, he drew forth his roll and requested me to read, while he was recovering his breath a little. My face must have turned as red as his—for this was the first theft I ever committed, except of some apples from a rival grower, a curmudgeon who would not tell us what they were—and I felt very queer as I read the following, written in round hand and with many capitals.

"Reward of one guinea!—Lost, stolen, or strayed, a large brindled terrier, known as 'Regulus,' the property of Miss Coldpepper of Coldpepper Manor. He is very hard of hearing, and a little fond of snapping. Any person bringing him home will receive the above reward, and no questions asked. Any one detaining him will be prosecuted, with the utmost rigour of the law."

Charles had a score perhaps of these placards,

written in sundry hands, and spelt in divers manners, as if all the household had been set to work.

"Oh, Mr. Kit," he cried, for every one called me that; "there is the devil to pay, up to the 'All, and no mistake! And all of it blamed on me, as innocent as the babe unborn, and more so, for only obeying of my horders. What did I do, but just turn the brute out—for a brute he is and no mistake, though wholesome in his bite, because it is his nature to; and no one round these parts would be tough enough in the legs to come forrard with a view of making off with him—then I shut the door to, for his quarter hour airing, as laid down in written horders issued every night. And my hair stood on end when he never come back, the same as his does, when he flies at you."

"But surely, Charles, some of you must have some suspicion?" I asked, with astonishment at my own vice, and wondering what I should come to, though not far enough gone as yet to look at him; "why should the dog go from such a good home?"

"Because he've had enough of it, or we of him at any rate. He ain't been stolen, sir; the dog have that knowledge of the world, that all

Seven Dials couldn't lay a tack to him. And everybody knows what our Missus is. A guinea! Who'd steal a dog for a guinea? Let alone a dog who'll make a pepper-caster of you. No, no, I always said Old Nick would come for 'un, some blessed morning; and I'm jiggered if he haven't! But bless my soul, you mustn't keep me loitering like this, sir. Mother Cutthumb wouldn't have one, to stick up in her dirty old window, Lord knows why. Do 'e take one, and stick on your Uncle's wall; or a couple if you will, that's a dear young man. There'll be thirty more ready, by eleven o'clock."

It occurred to me that some of them perhaps had been written by a certain lovely warm hand, which had the most delicious way with it that could ever be imagined of stealing in and out of muff or glove, and of coming near another hand (as coarse as a crumpet) in a sort of way that seemed to say—"Now wouldn't you like to touch me?"

"Who on earth can have written all these?" I asked. "Mr. Charles, why you must have done most of them yourself."

"Never a blessed one; Lord save you, I've a' been on my poor legs, all the morning! Every maid that could fist a few was ordered

in. But the young leddy fisted them four at the bottom."

Making due allowance for his miscreant coarseness, I slipped away the lowest four, and two others; those two I stuck up on the outer face of Uncle Corny's red-brick wall; but the other four never were exhibited to the public, nor even to myself, except as a very private view. And every one of them belongs to me at the present moment. The footman thanked me warmly for this lightening of his task, and hurried on towards Rasp the baker, and the linen-draper.

So far as my memory serves, Uncle Corny got very little work out of me that day. I was up and down the village, till my conscience told me that my behaviour might appear suspicious; and I even beheld the great lady herself, driving as fast as her fat steeds could travel, to get her placards displayed all around in the villages towards London. Although she was not very popular, and the public seemed well pleased with her distress, I felt more than half inclined to take her dear love back, and release him at his own door after dark. But Tabby Tapscott said, and she had a right to speak,—"Don't 'e be a vule now, Measter Kit. Carr' the job

droo, wanst 'a be about 'un." And just before dark I met Mrs. Marker, and somebody with her, who made my heart jump. They had clearly been sent as a forlorn hope, to go the round of the shops where the bills had been posted. I contrived to ask tenderly whether the dog was found.

"Not he, and never will be," replied the housekeeper. "There are so many people who owe the cur a grudge. Why, he even flies at me, if I dare to look at him. Miss Kitty, tell Mr. Kit what your opinion is."

"I fear indeed that somebody must have shot him with an air-gun. I am very fond of dogs, when they are at all good dogs; but very few could praise poor Regulus, except—except as we praise mustard. And I heard of a case very like it in London."

Her voice was so silvery sweet, and she dropped it (as I thought) so sadly at that last word, that I could not help saying, although I was frightened at my own tone while I said it—

"Surely you are not going back to-morrow? Do say, that you are not going to leave us all to-morrow."

Before she could answer, the housekeeper

said sharply—"She was to have gone to-morrow, Mr. Orchardson. But now Miss Coldpepper has made up her mind to send for Captain Fairthorn the first thing to-morrow, unless she recovers the dog meanwhile. Not that he knows anything about dogs, but he is so scientific that he is sure to find out something. Good night, sir! Come, Kitty, how late we are!"

Is it needful to say that Regulus indued a tunic of oak that night?

CHAPTER X.

AN UPWARD STROKE.

The character of Captain Fairthorn—better known to the public now as Sir Humphrey Fairthorn, but he had not as yet conferred dignity upon Knighthood—will be understood easily by those who have the knowledge to understand it. But neither Uncle Corny, nor myself—although we were getting very clever now at Sunbury—could manage at all to make him out at first, though it must have been a great deal easier then, than when we came to dwell upon him afterwards. All that he said was so perfectly simple, and yet he was thinking of something else all the time; and everything he did was done, as if he let some one else do it for him. I cannot make any one understand him, for the plainest of all plain reasons—I could never be sure that I myself understood him. And this was not at all

because he meant to be a mystery to any one; for that was the last thing he would desire, or even believe himself able to be. The reason that kept him outside of our reason—so far as I can comprehend it—was that he looked at no one of the many things to be feared, to be desired, to be praised, or blamed, from the point of view we were accustomed to.

I had thought that my Uncle Cornelius (though he was sharp enough always, and sometimes too sharp, upon me and my doings) was upon the whole the most deliberate and easy-going of mortals; but a mere glance at Professor Fairthorn showed how vastly the breadth of mankind was beyond me. To look at his face, without thinking about him, was enough to compose any ordinary mind, and charm away any trivial worries; but to listen to his voice, and observe him well, and meet his great eyes thoughtfully, and to catch the tranquillity of his smile, this was sufficient to make one ashamed of paltry self-seeking and trumpery cares, and to lead one for the moment into larger ways. And yet he was not a man of lofty visions, poetic enthusiasm, or ardent faith in the grandeur of humanity. I never heard him utter one eloquent sentence, and I

never saw him flush with any fervour of high purpose. He simply seemed to do his work, because it was his nature, and to have no more perception of his influence over others, than they had of the reason why he owned it. So far as we could judge, he was never thinking of himself; and that alone was quite enough to make him an enigma.

Now people may suppose, and very naturally too, that my warm admiration of the daughter impelled me to take an over-lofty view of the father. People would be quite wrong, however, for in that view I was not alone; every one concurred, and even carried it still further; and certainly there was no personal resemblance to set me on that special track. Professor—or as I shall call him henceforth, because he preferred it, Captain Fairthorn—was not of any striking comeliness. His face was very broad, and his mouth too large, and his nose might be said almost to want re-blocking, and other faults might have been found by folk who desire to talk picturesquely. But even the hardest of mankind to please (in everything but self-examination) would have found no need, and small opportunity, for improvement in his eyes and forehead. I know my own stupidity, or at

least attempt to do so, when it is not altogether too big; yet I dare to deny that it had anything to do with the charm I fell under in this man's presence. And this is more than proved by the fact that Uncle Corny—as dry an old Grower as was ever frozen out—could resist the large quietude of our visitor, even less than I could.

For the Captain had been sent for, sure enough, about a little business so far below his thoughts. And when he came into our garden, to thank us for all we had done towards discovery of the thief, and especially to thank me for my valiant services to his daughter, it is no exaggeration at all to say that I wished the earth would hide me from his great gray eyes. Under their kindly and yet distant gaze, I felt what a wretched little trickster I had been; and if he had looked at me for another moment, I must have told him everything, for the sake of his forgiveness. But he, unhappily for himself, if he could be unhappy about little things, measured his fellow-men by his own nature, and suspected nothing until it had been proved. And at that very moment, he caught sight of something, which absorbed him in a scientific zeal we could not follow.

"A young tree dead!" he exclaimed; "and with all its foliage hanging! Three other young trees round it injured on the sides towards it. When did you observe this? Had you that storm on Saturday?"

"Yes, sir, it did rain cats and dogs," my Uncle answered after thinking. "We said that it might break the long bad weather; and it seems to have done it at last, thank the Lord. There was a lot of lightning, but not so very nigh."

"Then no trees were struck from above, not even that old oak, which seems to have been struck some years ago? May I cross the border, and examine that young tree? Thank you; have you ever known a case like this before?"

They passed very dangerously near the old oak; and I trembled, as that villain of a Regulus showed his base want of gratitude by a long howl; but luckily neither of them heard it. I went to the door, and threatened him with instant death, and then followed to hear the discussion about the tree. "You have known it before," Captain Fairthorn was saying; "but not for some years, and if you remember right, not when the storms were particularly near.

I have heard of several similar cases, but never had the fortune to see one till now. You perceive that the life is entirely gone. The leaves are quite black, but have a narrow yellow margin. Forgive me for troubling you, Mr. Orchardson, but when did you notice this condition of the tree?"

"Well, sir, it kept on raining up till dark on Saturday; and I did not chance to come by here on Sunday. But on Monday morning it was as you see it now—gone off all of a heap, and no cause for it. As healthy a young tree as you would wish to look at—a kind of pear we call Beurré Diel. Dead as a door-nail, you can see. Kit, get a spade, and dig it up for Professor."

"Thank you, not yet. I was going home to-night, but this is a matter I must examine carefully. That is to say, with your kind permission. We use big words, Mr. Orchardson, that sound very learned; and we write very positively from other people's observation. But one case, that we have seen with our own eyes, and searched into on the spot to the utmost of our power, is worth fifty we have only read of. You will think me very troublesome, I greatly fear; and of gardening matters I know

less than nothing. But you will oblige me more than I can say, if you will let me come again, and try to learn some little. You know what has killed this tree, I presume."

"No, sir, I have not got any sense at all about it," my Uncle answered stoutly; "'tis the will of the Lord, when a tree goes off; or if it is the doing of any chap of mine, he goes off too, and there's an end of it. Something amiss with these roots, I take it."

His boots were tipped with heavy iron, and he was starting for a good kick at the dead young tree, when I ran between, and said, "Uncle, let it stay just as it is, for a day or two. It can't draw anything out of the ground; and this gentleman would like to examine it, as it is."

"Young gentleman, that is the very point," Captain Fairthorn, as he spoke, looked kindly at me; "if I could be permitted to have my own way, I would have a little straw shaken round it to-night, as lightly as may be, without any foot coming nearer than can be helped to it. That will keep the surface as it is, from heavy rain, or any other accident. Then if I may be indulged in my crotchets, I would bring my daughter, who draws correctly, to make a careful

sketch and colour it. And after that is done, and I have used my treble lens at every point of divergence, I would ask as a very great favour to be allowed to open the ground myself, and trace the roots from their terminal fibres upwards. I would not dare to ask all this for my own sake, Mr. Orchardson; but because we may learn something from it of a thing as yet little understood—what is called the terrestrial discharge. We get more and more into big words, you see. You have known trees destroyed in this way before. It only happens on certain strata."

"It has happened here, sir, for generations," said my Uncle, trying hard to look scientific. "The thunderstorm blight, is what we call it. We call anything a blight, when the meaning is beyond us. Seems as if some trees was subject to it. I never knew an apple-tree took this way. But pear-trees have been so, times out of mind, though never none but the younger ones. A few years agone, I can't say how many, seventeen young pear-trees were killed outright, ten in one part of the grounds, and seven in another, and not a mark to be found on one of them. All as dead as door-nails, when we come to look at them. A blight, or a blast,

that's what we call it. And there's nothing to do, but to plant another."

"A truly British view of the question," Captain Fairthorn answered with his sweet smile, which threw me into a glow by its likeness to a smile yet lovelier; "I wish I could tell you how I feel for the English fruit-grower in his hard struggle with the climate, the dealers, and the foreign competition. It is a hard fight always, much worse than the farmer's; and a season like this is like knocking a drowning man on the head. And yet you are so brave that you never complain!"

The truth of these words, and the tone of good-will, made a deep impression upon both of us, especially upon my Uncle, who had to find the money for everything.

"No, sir, we never complain," he replied; "we stand up to the seasons, like our own trees; and we keep on hoping for a better time next year. But there are very few that know our difficulties; and folk that can scarcely tell a pear from an apple go about the country, spouting and writing by the yard, concerning of our ignorance. Let them try it, is all I say, let them try it, if they are fools enough. Why bless my heart, there's a fellow preaching now

about sorting of apples, as if we had not done it before he sucked his coral! But I won't go on maundering—time will show. Glad to see you, sir, at any time; and if I should happen to be about the grounds, my nephew Kit will see to everything you want. What time shall we see you to-morrow, sir?"

We were walking to the gate by this time, and Captain Fairthorn pulled out his watch. I observed that he had a true sailor's walk, and a sailor's manner of gazing round, and the swing of his arms was nautical.

"What a time I have kept you!" he exclaimed with simple wonder; "and I have forgotten altogether my proper business. I was to have tried some special means for recovering the dog we were speaking of. Unless he is heard of to-night, I shall have little time to spare to-morrow. I am bound to do all I can for my good hostess. But to think that a dog, and a dog of no benevolence—according to my daughter—should stand in the way of this most interesting matter! However, I will do my best all the morning, and try to be with you by eleven o'clock. If I cannot come then, you will know what the cause is. But even for the best of dogs, I must not drop

the subject. Now I thank you most heartily. Good night!"

"What a wonderful man!" was my Uncle's reflection; "to know all about trees, and thunderstorms, and dogs, and Covent Garden! And yet to let a woman twist him round her thumb, and tread on his child, and turn his pockets inside out! Come along, Kit, I am pretty nigh starved."

And this wonderful man added yet another crown to his glory that very same night, as I heard. For to him, and his wisdom, was set down the credit of a joyful and extraordinary event.

A young man, slouching with a guilty conscience and a bag on his back, might have been seen—if his bad luck had prevailed—approaching a fine old mansion craftily, when the shadows stole over the moon, if there was one. Then an accurate observer might have noticed a quadruped of somewhat downcast mien issuing with much hesitation from a sack, and apparently reluctant to quit his guardian, who had evidently won his faithful heart. But receiving stern orders to make himself scarce, he might next be seen gliding to a gloomy door, uplifting wistfully one ancient paw,

scraping at the paint where it had been scraped before, and then throwing his head back, and venting his long-pent emotions in a howl of inexpressible sadness. The door was opened, the guardian vanished with suspicious promptitude, lights were seen glancing in a long range of windows, an outbreak of feminine voices moved the air, and after a shrill and unnatural laugh, came a sound as of hugging, and a cry of—"Run, for your life, for his liver, Jane!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FINE ARTS.

When the butter that truly is butterine, and the "Cheddar" of the Great Republic, are gracefully returned to our beloved grocer, with a feeble prayer for amendment, what does he say? Why, the very same thing that he said upon the last occasion—"Indeed! All our customers like it extremely; it is the very thing we have had most praise for; and this is the very first complaint."

In like manner I received for answer (when I fain would have sent back to that storekeeper Love a few of the sensations I had to pay for) that everybody praised them, and considered them ennobling, and was only eager once again to revel in their freshness. And to tell the truth, when my own time came for looking calmly back at them, I became one of the larger public, and would have bought them

back at any price, as an old man regards his first caning.

However I did not know that now, and could not stop to analyse my own feelings, which might for the moment perhaps be described as deep longings for a height never heard of. All the everyday cares, and hide-bound pothers of the people round me, were as paltry pebbles below my feet; and I longed to be alone, to think of one other presence, and only one.

Uncle Corny, in his downright fashion, called me as mad as a March hare; but I was simply sorry for him, and kept out of his way, and tried to work. Tabby Tapscott became a plague, by poking common jokes at me; and the family-men on the premises seemed to have a grin among themselves, when my back was turned. The only man I could bear to work with, was the long one we called "Selsey Bill," because he came from that part of Sussex, and resembled that endless projection. He was said to have seventeen lawful children—enough to keep any man silent. Moreover he was beyond all doubt the ugliest man in the parish; which may have added to my comfort in his mute society, as a proof of the facility of wedlock. The sharp click of his iron heel on the treddle of his spade,

the gentle sigh that came sometimes, as he thought of how little he would find for supper, and the slow turn of his distorted eyes as he looked about for the wheelbarrow—all these by some deep law of nature soothed my dreamy discontent.

But what was there fairly to grumble at? If I chose to cast my eyes above me, and set my affections out of reach, reason could not be expected to undo unreason. And hitherto, what luck had led me, what good fortune fed me with the snatches of warm rapture! Even my own wickedness had prospered, and never been found out. Surely the fates were on my side, and the powers of the air encouraged me.

What a lovely morning it was now, for the fairest of beings to walk abroad, and for me to be walking in the same direction! Although the earth was sodden still, and the trees unripe with summer drip, and the autumnal roses hung their sprays with leathery balls, instead of bloom; yet the air was fresh, and the sky bright blue, and the grass as green as in the May month; and many a plant, that is spent and withered after a brilliant season, was opening its raiment to tempt the sun, and budding into gems for him to polish. The spring, that

had forgotten tryst with earth this year, and been weeping for it ever since, was come at last, if only for one tender glance through the russet locks of autumn. Why should not man, who suffers with the distresses of the air and earth, take heart again, and be cheerful with them; ay, and enjoy his best condition—that of loving, and being loved?

There was enough to tempt the gloomiest, and most timid mortal, to make his venture towards such bliss, when Kitty Fairthorn, blushing softly, and glancing as brightly as the sunshine twinkles through a bower of wild rose, came alone to me alone, where I stood looking out for her father. Although I had been thinking bravely all the things set down above, not one of them kept faith, or helped me to the courage of their reasoning. Instead of that, my heart fell low, and my eyes (which had been full of hope) would scarcely dare to render to it the picture of which it held so many, yet never could manage to hold enough. She saw my plight, and was sorry for it, and frightened perhaps both of that and herself.

"It is so unlucky," she said, without looking any more than good manners demanded at me; "last night I began to think that all was going

to be quite nice again; for that very peculiar dog, that my Aunt is so strongly attached to, just came back; as if he had only gone for a little airing on his own account, and so as to have all the road to himself. He was as fat as ever, but oh so gentle! And his reputation is not quite that. Perhaps you have heard of him. He seems to be well known."

"I think I have heard of him. Why, of course it must be the dog that was mentioned in the hand-bills! We had two of them upon our wall. Mrs. Marker was speaking of him, when you passed on Thursday, only I could not attend to *her*."

"Then you ought to have done so," she replied, as if without any idea of my inner thought; "for there has been the greatest excitement about it. But I suppose, inside these walls, and among these trees and lovely flowers, you scarcely know what excitement is."

"Don't I then? Oh, I wish I didn't!" I replied with a deeply sad look at her; "it is you, who are so much above all this, who can have no idea what real—real—a sort of despair, I mean, is like. But I beg your pardon; you mustn't notice me."

"How can I help being sorry for you?" she

asked very softly, when our eyes had met. "You have been so good to me, and saved my life. But of course I have no right to ask what it is. And I know that the crops are always failing. And now you have a dear little tree quite dead. My father has sent me, to try to make a careful drawing of it, because it was struck by some extraordinary lightning. And the worst of it is, that he has been called away, and can hardly be back till the evening. He has invented a new conductor, for ships of the Navy, that are to have iron all over and under them, and therefore want protecting. He had a letter from the Admiralty this morning."

"Oh dear, what a pity! What a sad loss!" I replied. "I am afraid it will take us so much longer, without having him here to direct us. And I doubt if my Uncle Cornelius will be able to be with us, half the time."

"Oh, that is just what I was to say!" her tone was demure, but her glance quite bright; "on no account am I to interfere with the valuable time of Mr. Orchardson. Indeed I shall not trouble any one. If I may only be shown the poor tree, and then be allowed to fetch a chair, or a stool, or even a hassock, and then be told where to find some clear water, and perhaps be

reminded when the time is one o'clock, I am sure I shall do beautifully."

"You are certain to do beautifully; there is no other way that you could do. No one shall be allowed to disturb you; I should like to see any one dare to come near you, except—except——"

"Except Mrs. Tapscott. You see I have heard of her. And it is so kind of you to think of her. Then I shall be quite happy."

"Mrs. Tapscott indeed! No, except me myself. I shall lock that chattering woman in the back kitchen, or how could you ever do a stroke? I am sure it will take you a very long time. There are three other trees that you ought to draw, if you wish to show exactly what the lightning did. I hardly see how you can finish to-day. If you leave off at one o'clock, it will be utterly impossible. And my Uncle Cornelius will be in such a rage, if you think of going back without anything to eat."

"How very kind everybody is down here! It is the very nicest place I ever have been in. It will be so miserable to go away. I am not at all accustomed to such kindness." Her lovely eyes glistened as she began to speak, and a tear was in each of them as she turned away. I felt

as if I could have cried myself, to see such an innocent angel so sad. But I durst not ask any questions, and was bound to go on as if I knew nothing.

"What a little drawing-block you have!" I said; "you ought to have one at least twice that size. Do let me lend you one. I have three or four; and you can choose which you like of them. And my pencils too, and my colour-box. There are none to be had in the village. If you will rest a moment in this little arbour, I will get them all, and a chair for you."

It did not take me long to let Tabby Tapscott know, that if she dared even to look out of the window, she would mourn for it all the rest of her life; moreover that she must not let anybody know in what direction I was gone, even if His Grace of C. G. himself came down, to grant us the best stall he had for ever. Tabby winked with both eyes, and enquired if I took her for a "vule, or a zany, or a coochey hosebird," and said she would have "zummut good for nummatin," by one o'clock. And as I hurried back to the bower, there came almost into my very hand the loveliest *Souvenir d'un Ami* rose that ever lifted glossy pink, to show the richer glow within. This rose I cut with the tender touch

which a gardener uses boldly, and laid it on my drawing-block, so that each exquisite tinge and fringe and curve of radiant leaflet, as well as the swanlike bend of stalk and soft retirement of sepal, led up to the crowning beauty of the bloom above them.

"I never saw anything to equal that," said one who might outvie the whole; "who can have taught you, Mr. Kit, such knowledge of what is beautiful?"

She had called me by my village-name; and more than that, she had let me know that she looked upon me as a rustic. I saw my advantage, and was deeply hurt, that she might make it up again.

"You are right," I answered, turning back, as if in sad abasement; "Miss Fairthorn, you are right indeed in supposing that I know nothing. However, I am able to carry a chair, and to wait upon you humbly. Let us go to the tree; and at one o'clock, I will venture to come, and tell the time."

"Oh, I never meant it at all like that! I could never have imagined you would take me up so. I seem to say the wrong thing always, as I am told every day at home. I hoped that it was not true; but now—now, I have given

offence to you, you, who have been so good to me. I could never attempt to draw to-day. I will tell my father that I was rude to you, and he will send somebody else to do it." I felt that this would have served me right; but I was not in love with justice.

"I implore you not to do that," I said; "really that would be too hard upon me. Why should you wish to be hard upon me? I am trying to think what I have done to deserve it. You are worse than the ground lightning."

"Then I suppose I killed your trees. I am not going now to be silly any more. Tell me what to do, to show that you have quite forgiven me. You know that I never meant to vex you." She looked at me so sweetly, that I could only meet her eyes.

"I declare it will be one o'clock, before I have done a thing. What will my father say? And I must be so careful. I am sure that you could do it better, better much than I can. Will you do it, while I go and look for Mr. Orchardson? I like him very much, and his fruit is so delicious. No, you won't relieve me? Well, shake hands, and be good friends again. May I have this lovely rose, to give my father something beautiful, when he comes back from London?"

I saw that she was talking fast, that my prudence might come back to me. She knew as well from my long gaze, that I loved her, and must always love her, as I to the bottom of my heart knew it. And she did not seem offended at me, only blushed, and trembled, just as if some important news were come (perhaps by telegraph), and she wondered while she opened it.

For me this was enough, and more almost than I could hope for—to let her keep this knowledge in her mind, and dwell upon it; until if happy Angels came—as they gladly would—to visit her, the sweetest of them all might fan it, with his wings, into her heart.

"Halloa, Kit my lad!" cried Uncle Corny, when he came to dinner, and my darling was gone with her sketch half done, and I had only dared to hover near her. "Sweetheart been here, they tell me. What a leary chap you are! When I heard Cap'en was gone to Town, I thought it was all over. I've been wanting you up at packing-shed, for the last three hours. No more good work left in you. That's what comes of sweethearting."

"Uncle Corny, if you must be vulgar, because you have no proper sense of things, the least

you can do is not to halloa, as if you were driving a truck of rags and bones."

"Hoity, toity! Here's a go! One would think there had been no courting done, since Adam and Eve, till your time. Too hot to hold—that's my opinion. And as for rags and bones, young fellow, that's just about what it will come to. The girl won't have sixpence, by what I hear; though there's lots of tin in the family. I know a deal more than you do about them. Don't pop the question, without my leave."

What a way to put it!

CHAPTER XII.

AN EMPTY PILE.

Although no token had passed between us, and no currency been set up, of that universal interchange, which my Uncle and Tabby termed "courting," I felt a very large hope now, that the goods I had to offer,—quiet as they were, and solid, without any spangle—were on their way to be considered, and might be regarded kindly. For while I knew how poor I was, in all the more graceful attributes, and little gifted with showy powers of discourse, or the great world's glitter, void moreover of that noble cash which covers every other fault, yet my self-respect and manhood told me that I was above contempt. Haughty maidens might, according to their lights, look down on me; let them do so, it would never hurt me; I desired no haughtiness. That which had taken my heart, and led it, with no loss to its own value, was sweetness, gentle-

ness, loving-kindness, tender sense of woman's nature, and the joy of finding strength in man. For though I am not the one to say it, I knew that I was no weakling, either in body, or in mind. Slow of wit I had always been, and capable only of enjoying the greater gifts of others; but as I plodded on through life, I found it more and more the truth, that this is the better part to have. I enjoy my laugh tenfold, because it is a thing I could never have made for myself.

But for a long time yet to come, there was not much laughter before me. One of the many griefs of love is, that it stops the pores of humour, and keeps a man clogged with earnestness. At the same time, he becomes the Guy, and butt for all the old jokes that can be discharged by clumsy fellows below contempt. None of these hit him, to any good purpose, because he is ever so far above them; but even the smell of their powder is nasty, as a whiff across his incense.

For eight and forty hours, it was my good fortune to believe myself happy, and thereby to be so; though I went to Church twice on Sunday, without seeing any one except the parson, who was very pleasant. But suddenly

on Monday a few words were uttered; and I became no better than a groan.

"Her be gan'," were the words of Mrs. Tapscott.

"Tabby, what the Devil do you mean?" I asked, though not at all accustomed to strong language.

"I tull 'e, her be gan'. Thee never zee her no more. Step-moother 'a been down, and vetched her." Tabby herself looked fit to cry; although there was a vile kind of triumph in her eyes, because she had prophesied it.

"Do you mean to tell me," I asked slowly, and as if I were preparing to destroy her, "that Miss Fairthorn has been taken away, without even saying 'Good-bye' to me?"

"Can't tull nort about no Good-bais. Her maight 'a left 'un for 'e. Her be gan to Lunnon town, and no mistake. Zeed the girt coach myzell, and the maid a-crying in her."

Without thinking properly what I was about, I clapped on a hat, and laid hold of a big stick, and set forth upon the London road; not the Hampton road which runs along the river, but the upper road from Halliford, which takes a shorter course through Twickenham. Tabby ran after me, shouting—"Be 'e mazed? If 'e

could vlai, 'e could never overget her. Be gan' dree hour, or more, I tull 'e."

But in spite of that fearful news, I strode on. And I might have gone steadily on till I got to London—for there was the track of the wheels quite plain, the wheels of Miss Coldpepper's heavy carriage—if I had not met our "Selsey Bill," the Bill Tompkins whom I may have mentioned. My Uncle had sent him to Twickenham, I think, to see about some bushel-baskets; and he was swinging home with a dozen on his head, which made his columnar height some fifteen feet; for he was six and three quarters, without his hat.

In reply to my fervid enquiries, he proceeded, in a most leisurely yet impressive manner, to explain that he had not met the carriage, because it had passed him on his way to Twickenham, and might be expected back by now; as Miss Coldpepper never allowed her horses to go beyond Notting-Hill Gate, whence her guests must go on other wheels into London. I took half of his baskets (for he was too long to be strong) and so returned to my uncle's gate, with half a dozen "empties" on my head, and a heart more empty than the whole of them.

This was almost a trifle compared to the grief

that befell me later on—which has left its mark on me till I die—for though cast down terribly, I was not crushed, and no miserable doubts came to rend me in twain. Though my darling was gone, I could tell where she was, or at any rate could find out in a day or two. And it was clear that she had been carried off against her will; otherwise how could our Tabby see her crying? It is a shameful and cruel thing, and of the lowest depths of selfishness, to rejoice at the tears of an Angel; and I did my very utmost to melt into softest sympathy. To be certain of the need for this, I examined Mrs. Tapscott most carefully as to the evidence.

"I zeed 'un wi' my own heyesight; girt big drops," she said, "the zize of any hazzlenits. Rackon, thee mouth be wattering, Measter Kit, vor to kiss 'un awai."

This may have been true, but was not at all the proper way to express it. The only thing wrong on my part was, that a lively thrill of selfish hope ran down the veins of sympathy. She wept—she wept! Why should she weep, except at having left behind her some one whom she would most sadly miss? Could it be Miss Coldpepper? Happily that was most unlikely, from the lady's character. Mrs. Marker? No,

I think not—a very decent sort of woman, but not at all absorbing. Uncle Corny? Out of the question. A highly excellent and upright man; but a hero of nails, and shreds, and hammers, and green-baize aprons, and goose-berry knives. Ah, but Uncle Corny has a nephew——

"Kit, I am sorry for you, my boy;" he came up to me, as I was thinking thus, even before he went to his tobacco-jar; "you are hard hit, my lad; I can see it in your face; and you shall have no more chaff from me. Very few girls, such as they are now, deserve that any straight and honest young chap, like you, should be down in the mouth about them. But your mother did, Kit, your mother did. And I am not sure but that this Miss Fairthorn does; though you can't judge a girl by her bonnet. But I am not going to be overcobbed like this. If you have set your heart upon the girl, and she on you,—so be it, Amen! You shall be joined together."

My Uncle came up, as he spoke, and looked with friendly intentions at me, and yet with a medical gaze and poise, which inclined me to be indignant. "It takes two parties to make an agreement," I said, neither gratefully, nor graciously.

"S'pose I don't know that, after all the robberies taken out of me? But I know what I say, and I tell you, that if your mind is set upon this matter, you shall have it your own way. Only first of all, be sure that you know your mind. Few people do, in this 'age of invention'—as they call it, without inventing much, except lies—if you are sure that you know your mind, speak out, and have done with it."

I stood up and looked at him, without a word. All my gratitude for his good-will was lost in my wrath at his doubt of my stedfastness.

"Very well," he said, "you need not stare, as if you were thunder and lightning. When you think about it, you will see that I was right; for this is no easy business, Kit, and not to be gone into, like a toss for sixpence. I have spoiled you, ever since you were a child; because you had no father, and no mother. You have had your own way wonderfully; and that makes it difficult for you to know your mind."

If that were the only obstacle, I ought to have the finest knowledge of my mind; for the times had been very far asunder, when I had been allowed to follow my own way. But I

knew that Uncle Corny took the other view; and he had this to bear him out, that he always managed that my way should be his way. It was not the time to argue out that question now; and one of my ways most sternly barred was that of going counter to him in opinion. So I only muttered that he had been very good to me.

"I have," he continued; "and you are bound to feel it. Five shillings a week you have been receiving, ever since you could be trusted to lay in a tree; as well as your board and lodging, and your boots, and all except tailoring. Very well, if you set up a wife, you will look back with sorrow on these days of affluence. But to warn you is waste of words, in your present frame. Only I wish you to hear both sides. I have no time now; but if you like to come to me, when I have done up my books, I will tell you a little story."

This I promised very readily; not only to keep him on my side, but because I saw that he knew much, not generally known in Sunbury, of the family matters which concerned my love, and therefore myself, even more than my own. And while he was busy with his books, which he kept in a fashion known only

to himself, I strolled down the village in the feeble hope of picking up some tidings. It was pleasant to find, without saying much, that our neighbours felt a very keen and kind interest in our doings. There was scarcely a woman who was not ready to tell me a great deal more than she knew; and certainly not one who did not consider me badly treated. Miss Fairthorn, by her sweet appearance and gentle manner, had made friends in every shop she entered; and the story of her sudden and compulsory departure became so unsatisfactory, that deep discredit befell our two policemen. But the only new point I discovered, bearing at all upon my case, was gained from Widow Cutthumb. This good lady was now in bitter feud with the house of Coldpepper, although she made it clear that the loss of their custom had nothing to do with it, being rather a benefit than otherwise.

She told me, with much dramatic force, some anecdotes of Miss Monica, the younger daughter of Squire Nicholas, and a daughter by no means dutiful. She had married, against her father's wish, the Honourable Tom Bulwrag, a gambler, and a drunkard, and if reports were true, a forger. As this appears in my Uncle's tale,

it need not have been referred to, but to show that the lady's early records were not fair among us. After impressing upon me the stern necessity of silence, as to these and other facts, Mrs. Cutthumb ended with a practical exhortation, dependent upon the question whether I had a spark of manhood in me. I replied that I hoped so, but as yet had few opportunities for testing it.

"Then, Mr. Kit," she proceeded, with her head thrown back and one fat hand clenched, "there is only one thing for you to do—to run away with the young lady. Don't stop me, if you please, Master Kit; you have no call to look, as if I spoke treason. Better men than you has done it; and better young ladies has had to bear it. It is what the Lord has ordained, whenever He has made two innocent young people, and the wicked hold counsel together against them. You go home, and dwell upon it. Sure as I am talking to you now, you'll be sorry till your dying day, if you don't behave a little spirity. Do you think I would ever give such advice to a wild young man with no principles, to a fellow I mean like Sam Henderson? But I know what you are well enough; and every girl in Sunbury

knows. 'Tis not for me to praise you to your face; but you are that solid and thick-built, that a woman might trust you with her only daughter. And that makes you slow to look into women. If I may be so bold to ask, how do you take the meaning of it for that sweet Miss Kitty to be fetched home so promiscuous?"

"Mrs. Cutthumb," I answered, with a penetrating look, to show her that she underrated me, "I fear it must be that some mischief-maker has written up to say that I, that I—you know what I mean, Mrs. Cutthumb."

"Yes, sir, and you means well so far, and everything straight-forrard; but you ain't got near the heart of it, Master Kit; nor your Uncle neither, I'll be bound. Wants a woman's wits for that."

"What on earth do you mean? It is bad enough. I don't see how even a woman can make it any worse than it is. Speak out what you mean, since you have begun."

"Well, sir, it is no more than this, and you mustn't be put out by it. Suppose there is another young gent in the case—a young gent in London, they means her to marry."

The good-natured woman looked so knowing,

that I thought she must have solid proof; and perhaps the deed was done already. I tried to laugh, but could only stare, and wonder what was coming next.

"Oh, Master Kit," she went on with her apron to her eyes, for she was kind of heart, "you used to come, and play down here, when your head wasn't up to the counter. And I had my Cut-thumb then, and he give you a penny, because you was so natural. Don't you be struck of a heap like that, or I shall come to think that all women is wicked. It was only a bad thought of my own. I have nothing to go by, if I were to die this minute; and the same thought might come across any one. Don't think no more about it, that's a dear young man. Only keep your eyes open, and if you can manage to come across that stuck-up Jenny Marker, the least she can do, after saving her life, is to tell you all she knows, and to take your part. But don't you believe more than half she says. I never would say a single word against her, there's no call for that, being known as she is to every true woman in Sunbury; but if she's not a double-faced gossiping hussy, as fancies that a gold chain makes a lady of her, and very likely no gold after all, why I should deserve to be

taken up, and there's no one has ever said that of me."

Here Mrs. Cutthumb began to cry, at the thought of being taken to the station; and I saw that time alone could comfort her, yet ventured to say a few earnest words, about her position and high character. And presently she was quite brisk again.

"Why bless my heart," she said, looking about for a box of matches on the onion shelf; "I ought to have stuck up my candle in the window, pretty well half an hour agone. Not that no customer comes after dark, nor many by daylight, for that matter. Ah, Master Kit, I am a poor lone widow; but you are the nicest young man in Sunbury; and I wish you well, with all my heart I do. And mind one thing, whatever you do; if you ever carries out what I was saying, here's the one as will help you to it, in a humble way, and without much money. A nice front drawing-room over the shop, bed-room, and chamber-suit to match. Only twelve shillings a week for it all, and the use of the kitchen fire for nothing. And the window on the landing looks on the river Thames, and the boats, and the barges, and the fishermen. Oh, Mr. Kit, with Mrs. Kitty now and then, it would be like the Garden of Eden."

CHAPTER XIII.

MY UNCLE BEGINS.

That last suggestion was most delicious, but it came too late to relieve the pang of the horrible idea first presented. I could not help wondering at my own slow wit, which ought to have told me that such a treasure as my heart was set upon, must have been coveted long ere now, by many with higher claims to it. Was it likely that I, a mere stupid fellow, half a rustic, and of no position, birth, or property, should be preferred to the wealthy, accomplished, and brilliant men, who were sure to be crowding round such a prize? Black depression overcame me; even as the smoke of London, when the air is muggy, falls upon some country village, wrapping in funereal gloom the church, the trees, the cattle by the pond, and the man at the window with his newspaper. I could not see my way to eat much supper, and my Uncle was crusty with me.

"Can't stand this much more," he said, as he finished the beer that was meant for me; "a plague on all girls, and the muffs as well that go spooning after them! Why, the Lord might just as well never have made a Williams pear, or a catshead codlin. S'pose you don't even want to hear my story; you don't deserve it anyhow. Better put it off, till you look brighter, for there isn't much to laugh at in it, unless it is the dunder-headed folly of a very clever man."

However I begged him to begin at once; for he had hinted that his tale would throw some light on the subject most important in the world to me; so I filled him five pipes that he might not hunt about, and made his glass of rum and water rather strong, and put the black stool for his legs to rest on, and drew the red curtain behind his head, for the evening was chilly, and the fire cheerful.

"Like to do things for myself," he muttered, while accepting these little duties. "Nobody else ever does them right, though meaning it naturally for the best. Well, you want to hear about those people; and you shall hear all I know, my lad; though I don't pretend to know half of all; but what I know I do know, and don't talk at random, like the old women here.

We'll take them in branches—male and female —until they unite, or pretend to do it; but a very poor splice; the same as you see, if you send for Camelias to Portugal, a great clumsy stick-out at the heel of the graft, and the bark grinning open all along. Bah! There's no gardeners like Englishmen, though we run 'em down for fear of boasting. Did you ever hear why Professor Fairthorn would ever so much rather be called 'Captain,' though 'Professor' sounds ever so much better?"

"Perhaps he has a legal right to be called 'Captain,' but not to the other title. I have heard that hundreds of people call themselves Professors, without any right to do it. And I am sure he would never like to be one of them."

"That has got nothing to do with it. He has held some appointment that gave him the right to the title, if he liked it. The reason is that his wife always calls him 'Professor;' and so it reminds him of her. Ah, don't you be in this outrageous hurry for a wife of your own, Master Kit, I say. For all I know, the Captain may have been as wild for her, some time, as you are for your Kitty. What can you say to that, my lad?"

"Why, simply that you don't know at all

what you are talking about, Uncle Corny. My Miss Fairthorn is not that lady's daughter, and is not to be blamed for the whole of her sex, any more than you are for the whole of yours."

"There is something in that, when one comes to see it," my Uncle replied; for his mind was generally fair, when it cost him nothing. "But you must not keep on breaking in like this, or you won't have heard half of it, this side of Christmas. Well, I was going to take them according to their sexes, the same as the Lord made them. And first comes the lady, as she hath a right to do, being at the bottom of the mischief.

"When I was a young man, thirty year or more agone, there used to be a lot of talk about the two handsome Miss Coldpeppers, of the Manor Hall down here. There used to be a lot also of coaches running, not so much through Sunbury, which lay to one side of the road, though some used to pass here on their way to Chertsey; and there was tootle-tootle along father's walls, three or four times a day. But the most of them went further back, along the Staines and Windsor road, where the noise was something wonderful; and it's my opinion that these Railway things will never be able to

compare with it. They may make as much noise for the time, but it seems to be over, before the boys can halloa.

"Lots of young sparks, and bucks, and dandies, and Corinthians, and I forget what else, but all much finer than you can see now, used to come down by the coaches then, some of them driving, some blowing the horn, some upon the roof like merry-Andrews, making fools of themselves as we should call it now, and not be far wrong either. They were much bigger men than I see now, in their size, and their way of going on, and their spirits, and their strength of life, and likewise in their language. And the manners of the time were as different as can be, more frolicsome like, and more free and jovial; and they talked about the ladies, and to them also, ten times as much as they do now; and things were altogether merrier for them that had the money, and no worse for them that hadn't got it, so far as I can see. Ah, there was something to be done in growing then—pineapples ordered at a guinea a pound, and grapes at fifteen shillings, though of course you didn't always get your money. I'm blest if I won't have another glass of rum and water.

"Well, old Squire Nicholas, as they call him

now, was as proud as Punch of his two fine daughters, and expected them to marry at least an Earl apiece, by their faces and fine figures. And they went about with great folk in Town, and to Court, and all that sort of thing, looking fit to marry the King almost, in their velvets, and their satin furbelows. The eldest daughter was Arabella, our Miss Coldpepper to this day, and the other was Miss Monica; as fine a pair of women as the Lord ever made. But for all that, see what they come to!

"There was no love lost between them even then, jealous of one another no doubt, like two cats over a fish-bone. Some said that one was the handsomer of them, and some said the other. There was a good bit of difference between them too, though any fool could tell they were sisters. Such eyes and noses as you won't see now, and hair that would fall to their knees, I've been told, and complexions as clear as a white-heart cherry, and a cock of the chin, and a lordly walk—they deserved the name they went by in London, 'the two Bright Suns of Sunbury.' But after all, what good came of it? One is an old maid, and the other—well, not very likely to go to heaven, though she hasn't had much of that yet on earth. Kit,

I have seen a deal of women, as much as is good for any mortal man; and I tell you the first thing, and the second, and the third, and the whole to the end of the chapter of them depends upon their tempers. Ah, those two beauties were beauties at that; but Miss Monica ever so much the worse.

"It seems that they both might have married very well, if it had not been for that stumbling-block. Many young women go on so soft, and eye you so pleasant, and blush so sweet, that you'd fancy almost there was no such thing as a cross word, or a spitfire look, or a puckered forehead in their constitution; and angels is the name for them, until it is too late to fly away. But these two Misses had never learned how to keep their tempers under for a week together; and it seems that they never cared enough for any one to try to do it. Till there came a man with a temper ten times as bad as both of theirs put together; and then they fell in love with him hot and hearty. This was a younger son of Lord Roarmore, a nobleman living in North Wales, or Ireland—I won't be certain which — and he was known as the Honourable Tom Bulwrag. He used to drive the Windsor coach from London down to

Hounslow; for the passengers could stand him, while the stones and air were noisy; but there he was forced to get down from the box; for nothing that lived, neither man, nor horse, nor cow in the ditch, could endure this gentleman's language, when there was too much silence to hear it in.

"I suppose he was quiet among the ladies, as many men are, who can speak no good. And perhaps our two ladies fell in love with him, because he was a bigger sample of themselves. Not that they ever used swearing words, only thought them, as it were, and let other people know it. Any way, both of them took a fancy to him, though their father would not hear of it; for the gentleman was not wealthy enough to have any right to such wickedness. Perhaps that made them like him all the more, for they always flew in the face of Providence. And for doing of that, they both paid out, as generally happens here, that we may see it.

"So far as I can tell, and I had better chances of knowing than any one else outside the house, everything was settled for the Honourable Tom to run away to Bath with Miss Arabella, with special licence, and everything square.

But whether she was touched in heart about her father (whose favourite she had always been), or whether her lover came out too strong in his usual style, or whether her sister Monica had egged her on to it, sure enough she blazed out into such a fury, just when they were starting, and carried on so reckless, that the Honourable Tom, who had never quite made up his mind, was frightened of what she would be by and by, and locked her in a tool-house at the bottom of the grounds, and set off with Miss Monica that same hour, changed the name in the licence, and married her.

"Without being too particular, you might fairly suppose that a job of this kind was not likely to end well. Miss Monica had taken with her one — what shall I say? Certainly not servant, nor attendant, nor inferior in any way——"

My Uncle here seemed to feel a certain want of power to express himself; and I knew that he was beating about the bush of the one and only one romance of his dry and steady life. He turned away, so that I could not see his eyes, and I did not wish to look at them.

"Well, that is neither here nor there," he continued, after pushing more tobacco into a pipe

too full already; "but she took away a young lady of this neighbourhood, to whom she appeared to be much attached, and who alone had any power to control her furious outbreaks, just because she always smiled at them, as soon as they were over. The sweet-tempered girl could never quite believe that the Fury was in earnest, because it was so far beyond her own possibilities; and the woman of fury did a far worse thing than the wrecking of her own stormy life, she also wrecked a sweet, and gentle, loving, and reasonable heart. Never mind that; it often happens, and what does the selfish Fury care? Miss Monica became, as I have said, the Honourable Mrs. Bulwrag, and then she reaped the harvest she had sown.

"For in the first place Viscount Roarmore, being a hot-headed man likewise, stopped every farthing of his son's allowance, and said—'Go to your new father. Your pretty cousin Rose, with five thousand pounds a year, was ready to marry you, in spite of all your sins, and you had promised to marry her. You have taken one of those two girls, who were called the "Bright Suns of Sunbury," till people found out what they were, and called them the two "Raging Suns." Now rage her down, if you can, and you ought

to be more than a match for a woman. In any case, expect no more from me.'

"Then the young man came to Squire Nicholas, and screwed himself down to eat humble-pie. But the Squire said, 'Sir, you have married my daughter, without asking my leave, and against it. I still have a dutiful daughter left. She is my only one henceforth.' Then the young man broke into the strongest language ever yet heard at Coldpepper Hall, although it had never been weak in that line. He was very soon shown the outside of the door, and got drunk for the night at the 'Bell and Dragon.'

"Then began the rough and tumble work between those two—the hugging and the hating, the billing and the bullying, the kissing and the kicking, all and every up and down of laughing, sobbing, scratching, screeching, that might be in a wild hyena's den. How they contrived to hold together so long as they did, Heaven only knows, or perhaps the opposite place to Heaven. There must have been some fierce love between them, some strange suitability; as if each perceived the worst part of himself or herself in the other, and flew to it, as well as flew at it. What kept them together was a mystery; but what kept them alive was a darker one. With-

out friends, or money, or credit, or visible robbery, they fought on together, for five or even six years, now here and now there. Three children they had, and fought over them of course, and perhaps began to teach them to fight each other, at least so far as example goes.

"But suddenly this queer union was broken up for ever. Mr. Bulwrag did something which risked his neck; he believed that Squire Nicholas was bound to contribute to the support of his grandchildren, and he made him do his duty, without knowing it. Then, having arranged for a three days' start, he was well upon his voyage before pursuit began. It is not very easy to catch a man now, when he has a good start, and knows the world; but five and twenty years ago, it was generally given up as a bad job; unless the reward was astounding. No reward was offered, and the Honourable Tom was next heard of from South America, where there seem to be a lot of little States, which never allow their civil wars to abate their wars with one another. This condition of things was exactly to his taste; his courage and strong language made their way; he commanded the forces of one great Republic, with the title of 'Marshal Torobelle,' and he

promised to send some money home in the last letter ever received from him.

"His deserted wife said after that, that she truly would believe in everything, if she ever saw a ten-pound note from her beloved husband. But she never was put to the trial, for the next news was that he was dead. He had found it much to his advantage to learn to swear in Spanish; and being proud of this, because he had little other gift of lingo, he tried it upon a young Spanish officer, who did not take it cordially. After parade, they had a private fight, and Marshal Torobelle could swear no more, even in his native language. His friends, for he seems to have been liked out there, wrote a very kind letter in bad French, telling how grand he had been, and how faithful, but grieving that he had left no affairs, to place them in a state to remember him. Then the Marshal's widow bought expensive mourning, for he had left with her a thousand pounds of the proceeds of his forgery, and wrote to his father, Lord Roarmore.

"Kit, I have found that one can generally tell what a man will do, in certain cases, from a rough outline of his character. What a woman will do, no man can tell, though he fancies he

knows her thoroughly. My Lord Roarmore was a violent man, and hot more than hard in his resolution. And he took it very kindly that his son, when driven hard, had forged the name of the father-in-law, and not of the father, as he might have done. He was beginning to relent already, and finding it too late naturally relented altogether. He talked of his noble and gallant son, and although himself in difficulties, bravely settled five hundred pounds a year upon the widow and the little ones.

"I dare say you are surprised, my lad, that I should have come to know so much of this unhappy story; more I believe than is even known by the lady's own sister—our Miss Coldpepper. Women are slower to forgive than men, and slower in begging to be forgiven. Arabella has never forgiven her sister for running away with her lover; and Monica has never forgiven her sister for making such a fuss about it. They may try to pull together, when it suits their purpose; but the less they see of one another, the greater the chance of their reconciliation. But I am not come to the poor Captain yet; and, bless my heart, it is ten o'clock! What a time to stay up about other people's business! If you want to hear the rest, you must have it to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

AND ENDS WITH A MORAL.

All through the following day, we were forced to be hard at work, whether we liked it or not, gathering a large lot of early apples, such as Keswick, Sugarloaf, and Julien, which would have been under the trees by this time in an early season. But this, through the chill and continual rain of the time that should have been summer, was the latest season within human memory; which (like its owners) is not very long. And now a break-up of the weather was threatened, at which we could not grumble, having now enjoyed ten days without any rain —a remarkable thing in much better years than this. And in this year it truly was a God-send, helping us to make some little push, before the winter closed over us, and comforting us to look up to Heaven, without being always beaten down. The people who live in great cities,

where they need only go a few yards all day long, and can get beneath an awning or an archway, if a drop of rain disturbs their hats, give the weather ten bad words for every one we give it; though we are bound to work in it, and worse than that, have our livelihood hanging upon it. Not that we are better pleased than they; only that our more wholesome life, and the strength of the trees, and the unexhausted air, perhaps put into us a kinder spirit to make the best of things that are ordered from above.

Few things in the manner of ordinary work become more wearisome after a while than the long-continued gathering of fruit. The scent, which is delightful to those who catch a mere whiff of it in going by, becomes most cloying and even irksome, to those who have it all day in their nostrils. And the beauty of the form and colour too, and the sleek gloss of each fine sample, lose all their delight in the crowd of their coming, and make us even long to see the last of them. Every man of us, even Uncle Corny, to whom every basket was grist for the mill, felt heartily glad when streaky sunset faded softly into dusk, when flat leaf looked as round as fruit, and apples knocked our heads instead of gliding into the ready hand.

"Now mind one thing," said my Uncle with a yawn, when, after a supper of liver and bacon knowingly fried by Mrs. Tabby, his pipe was between his teeth and all his other needs were toward; "if I go on with my tale to-night, I am likely enough to leave out something which may be the gist of it. For I feel that sleepy, after all this job, that I can scarcely keep my pipe alight. However you have worked well to-day, and shown no white feather for your sweetheart's sake; and of course you want to know most about her, and how she comes into this queer tale. Poor young thing, she smiles as sweetly, as if she trod a path of roses, instead of nettles, and briars, and flint! Ah, I suppose she forgets her troubles, whenever she looks at you, my lad." This made my heart beat faster than any words of his tale I had heard till now.

"As if she cared for me! As if it were possible for any one to imagine that she would ever look twice at me! Uncle Corny, I thought you were a wiser man." I hoped that this might lead him on.

"To be sure, I was making a mistake," he answered, looking as if it were just the same thing. "When I said you, I meant of course

Sam Henderson, the racing man. That's the young fellow that has her heart. How beautifully she smiled when I mentioned him, and blushed when I said he was the finest fellow anywhere round Sunbury, and the steadiest, and the cleverest.

"No, no, Kit; it's all my fun. You needn't be looking at the carving-knife. You know how I hate Sam Henderson, a stuck-up puppy, and a black-leg too, according to my ideas. A girl who respects herself, as your Kitty does, would have nothing to say to him. But she might to a fine young gardener perhaps.

"Well, I have told you all about the first marriage and the widowhood of that precious Monica Coldpepper. What fools men are—what wondrous fools! Here was a widow, not over young, with a notorious temper, and no money, or none of her own at any rate, and hampered with three children—let me tell you their names while I think of it, Euphrasia, Donovan, and Geraldine—there's no duty to pay on a name, you know. Now would not any one have sworn that a woman like that might wear the weeds, until she had stormed herself to death? Not a bit of it, my lad; she married again, and she married the cleverest man in London; and more

than that, she got every farthing of his property settled upon her, although the poor man had a child of his own! And I am told that she might have had a dozen other men.

"She was still a fine woman certainly, for it must have been some twelve years ago; and she is a fine woman to this very day, according to those who have seen her; which I hope I may never do, for reasons I will not go into. But beside her appearance, what one thing was there to lead a sane man to marry her? And a man who had lost a sweet-tempered wife, a beautiful, loving, and modest woman, as like your Kitty as two peas! Sometimes I feel sorry for him, when I think of his former luck; and sometimes I am glad that he is served out, for making such a horrible fool of himself. Nearly any other man would have hung himself, for the lady has gone from bad to worse, and is now a thorough termagant; but this man endures her as if she were his fate. Do you know who he is? You must know now."

"Yes, I have known it, since you began; and from what other people said, I suspected it before." As I answered thus, I was thinking how this condition of things would affect my chance.

"You don't seem at all astonished, Kit;" my Uncle went on with some disappointment at losing his sensation. "You young folk have so little sense, that you make it a point of honour never to be surprised by anything. If anybody had told me, without my knowing it already, that a man of great intellect, like Professor Fairthorn, would make such a fool of himself, and then submit to have no life of his own, I should have said it was a crazy lie. But there is the truth, my boy, not to be got over; and far worse than at first sight appears. A man who robs himself may be forgiven; but not a man who robs his children. It is the difference between suicide and murder.

"Very likely, you are surprised that I, who have not a sixpence at stake, and not even a friend involved in the matter, should get so hot about it, as I can't help being. There are plenty of viragoes in the world; there are plenty of good men who cower before them, for the sake of their own coward peace; also there are robberies in abundance, of children who cannot defend themselves, and of people who can—so far as that goes. And ninety-nine men in a hundred would say—'Well, this is no concern of mine. It is a very sad and shameful thing, but

it does not touch my bread and cheese. Great is truth, and it will prevail; and I hope I may live to see it.' But, Kit, my boy, the worst wrong of all was mine. A deadlier wrong has been done to me, than of money, or lands, or household peace. My life has been wrecked by that devil of a woman, as if it were a toy-boat she sunk with her slipper. I did not mean to tell you—an old man cannot bear to talk of such things to young people. Is your whole heart set upon your Kitty?"

I had never seen my Uncle so disturbed before; and, to tell the plain truth, I was frightened by it. Sometimes I had seen him in a little passion, when he found a man he trusted robbing him, or the dealers cheated him beyond the right margin, or some favourite plant was kicked over; but he never lost his power then of ending with a smile, and a little turn of words would change his temper. But this was no question of temper now. His solid face was hardened, as if cast in stone; not a feature of it moved, but his gray curls trembled in the draught, and his hand upon the table quivered. I answered that my whole heart was set upon my Kitty, but I knew that I should never win her.

"If she is true to you, you shall. That is, if you behave as a man should do;" he spoke very slowly, and with a low voice, almost as if talking to himself; "if you are wise enough to let no lies, or doubts, or false pride come between you. There is no power, but the will of God, that can keep asunder a man and woman, who have given their lives to each other. All the craft, and falsehood, and violence of the world melt away like a mist, if they stand firm and faithful, and abide their time. But it must hold good on both sides alike. Both must disdain every word that comes from lying lips, from the lips of all, whether true or false, except one another. Remember, that is the rule, my lad, if rogues and scoundrels, male or female, come between you and the one you love. It has been the black streak in my life. It has kept me lonely in the world. Sometimes it seems to knock me over still. I have not spoken of it for years; and I cannot speak of it even now any more—not any more."

He rose from his chair, and went about the room, as if it were his life, in which he was searching for something he should never find. To turn his thoughts, and relieve my own, I took a clean pipe and filled it; and began to

puff as if I liked it, although in those days I seldom smoked. This had been always a reproach against me; for a smoker seems to love a contribution to his cloud.

"Well done, Kit, you are a sensible fellow;" said my Uncle, returning to his usual mood. "Tobacco is the true counterblast to care. You take up your pipe, and I will take up my parable, without going into my own affairs. I never told you how that confounded woman—the Lord forgive me if I bear malice, for I trust that He shares it with me—how she contrived to hook the poor Professor, and, what is still worse, every farthing of his money.

"Not that I believe, to give the devil his due, that she sought him first for the sake of his money. He had not very much of that—for it seldom goes with brains that stamp their own coinage—but through his first wife, a beautiful and loving woman, he owned a nice house with large premises, in a rich part of London, or rather of the outskirts, where values were doubling every year, as the builders began to rage round it. Also he had about five thousand pounds of hers, which was not under settlement, and perhaps about the same amount of his own, not made by himself (for he had no gift of saving) but

coming from his own family. Altogether he was worth about twenty thousand pounds; which he justly intended for his only child.

"This was pretty handsome, as you would say, and he took care not to imperil it, by any of his patents, or other wasteful ways. He had been for many years in the Royal Navy, and commanded at one time a new-fangled ship, with iron sheathings, or whatever they are called, which are now superseding the old man-of-war. Here he had seemed to be in his proper element, for he knew the machinery and all that, as well as the makers did, and much better than any of the engineers on board; and he might have been promoted to almost anything, except for his easy-going nature. He had not the sternness, and strength of will, which were needful in his position; and though everybody loved and respected him, the discipline of the ship in minor matters fell abroad, and he was superseded.

"This cut him to the quick, as you may suppose; for he still was brooding over the loss of his first dear wife, which had befallen him, while he was away on some experimental cruise. Between the two blows, he was terribly out of heart, and came back to his lonely London

house, in the state of mind, which is apt to lay a man at the mercy of a crafty and designing woman. Unhappily he was introduced just then to Mrs. Bulwrag; and she fell in love with him, I do believe, as far as she was capable of doing it. Though she might have flown, and had been flying at higher game in a certain sense, she abandoned all others, and set the whole strength of her will, which was great, upon conquering him. She displayed the most tender and motherly interest in his little darling daughter; she was breathless with delight at his vast scientific attainments, and noble discoveries; she became the one woman in all the world, who could enter into his mind, and second his lofty ideas for the grandeur of humanity. Unluckily they were so far apart in their natures, that no collision yet ensued, which might have laid bare her true character, and enforced the warnings of his many friends. Not to make too long a story of it, she led him to the matrimonial altar—as the papers call it —without any solicitor for his best man, but a very sharp one behind her. With the carelessness of a man of genius, added to his own noble faith in woman, he had signed a marriage settlement, which gave her not only a life-

interest in all his property, but a separate power of disposal by assignment, which might be exercised at any time. And the trustees were old allies of hers, who were not beyond suspicion of having been something even more than that.

"However she loved her dear Professor—as she insisted on calling him—for a certain time, with the fervour of youth, though she must have been going on for forty, and she led him about in high triumph, and your Kitty was sent to a poor boarding-school. 'The Honourable Mrs. Bulwrag-Fairthorn,' as, in defiance of custom, she engraved herself, became quite the fashion among a certain lot, and aspired to climb yet higher. For if she has a weakness, it is to be among great people, and in high society. She changed the name of the poor Professor's house at South Kensington to 'Bulwrag Park,' she thought nothing of paying thirty pounds for a dress, and she gave large parties all the night long. Meanwhile he went about his work, and she took possession of every halfpenny he earned, and spent it on herself and her children. Her boy and two girls were pampered and indulged, while Kitty was starved and threadbare.

"You have seen the sort of man he is—simple,

quiet, and unpretending, full of his own ideas and fancies, observing everything in the way of nature, but caring very little for the ways of men. He kept himself out of the whirl she lived in, and tried to believe that she was a good, though rather noisy woman. But suddenly all his good-will was shattered, and he nearly shared the same fate himself.

"He was sitting up very late one night, in the little room allowed to him for the various tools, and instruments, and appliances, and specimens, and all that sort of thing, which were the apple of his eye; and by a special light of his own devising he was working up the finish of some grand experiment, from which he expected great wonders, no doubt. I don't know how many kinds of acid he had got in little bottles, and how many—I don't know what their names are, but something of a kail, like 'Ragged Jack;' and how many other itemies—as Tabby Tapscott calls them—the Lord only knoweth, who made them; and perhaps the men have got beyond even Him. At any rate, there he was, all in his glory; and he would have given ten years of his life, to be let alone for an hour or two. But suddenly the door flew open, as if with a strong kick; and the shake, and the

draught, set his flames and waters quivering. He looked up with his mild eyes, and beheld a Fury.

"'What do you mean by this?' she cried. 'Here I come home from Lord Oglequince's, where you left me to go by myself, as usual; and on my red Davenport I find this! A fine piece of extravagance! Whose money is it?'

"'Well, Monica, it was not meant to go to you,' the Professor replied; for he saw what it was, a bill of about three pounds, for a cloak, and a skirt, and a hat, or some such things, which his daughter's school-mistress had written for, because the poor girl was unfit to be seen with the rest. 'My dear, I will pay it, of course. You have nothing to do with it. It was put on your desk by mistake altogether.'

"'Oh, then you meant to do it on the sly! To spend on this little upstart of yours the money that belongs to my poor children. Whose house is this? Whose chair are you sitting on —for of course you never have the manners to rise, when a lady comes to speak to you? Do you think you will ever make a penny, by all your trumpery dibbles and dabbles? I hate the sight of them, and I will not allow them. Hand me that cane, with the sponge at the end.'

"The Captain arose under her rebuke, and looked at her with calm curiosity, as if she were part of his experiment. He had never seen a case of such groundless fury, and could scarcely believe that it was real. Her blazing eyes were fixed on his, and her figure seemed to tower, in her towering rage. Such folly however could not frighten him; and he smiled, as if looking at a baby, while he handed her the cane.

"'You laugh at me, do you? You think I am your slave?' she cried as she swung the cane round her head, and he fully expected the benefit. 'Because I am a poor weak woman, I am to be trampled on, in my own house, and come on my knees, at these shameful hours, to hold all your gallipots and phials for you. Look, this is the way I serve your grand science! There go a few of them, and there, and there! How do you like that, Professor?—Oh, oh, oh!'

"At the third sweep of the cane among his chemical treasures, she had dashed on the floor, among many other things, a small stoppered bottle full of caustic liquid, and a fair dose had fallen on her instep, which was protected by nothing but a thin silk stocking. Screeching with pain she danced round the room, and then

fell upon a chair, and began to tear her hair, in a violent fit of hysterics.

"'It is painful for the moment; but there is no serious harm,' said the Captain, as he rang the bell for her own attendant; 'fortunately the contents of that bottle were diluted, or she might never have walked again; if indeed such a style of progress is to be called walking. It is most unwise of any tiro to interfere with these little enquiries. I was very near a fine result; and now, I fear, it is all scattered.'

"The next day he did, what he should have done some months ago. He took the copy of his marriage-settlement to a good solicitor, and found, to his sad astonishment, that the boasts of the termagant were too true. Under the provisions of that document—as atrocious a swindle as was ever perpetrated—he could be turned out of his own house, and the property he intended for his own child was at the mercy of her stepmother.

"From the lawyer he got not a crumb of comfort. The settlement was his own act and deed; there was no escaping from it. It had been prepared by the lady's solicitors; and he had signed it without consideration. All very true; but he should have considered, and mar-

riage was a consideration, in the eye of the law, and a binding one. If the Professor wished, the solicitor would take Counsel's opinion, whether there might be any chance of obtaining redress from Equity. But he felt sure, that to do so would only be a waste of money. It was a most irregular thing, that in such an arrangement, one side only should be represented; but that was the fault of the other side, which surrendered its own interests. In fact, it was a very fine instance of confidence in human nature; and human nature had been grateful enough to make the most of the confidence offered.

"If you did not know what the Professor is, you might suppose, Kit, that he was overcome, and overwhelmed with the result of his own neglect and softness. Not a bit of it; in a week's time, he had mended all his broken apparatus; and the only difference to be noticed was, that he never began work without locking the door. His treatment of his wife was the same as ever. He bore no ill-will, or at any rate showed none, on account of that strong explosion; and he took thenceforth all her fits of fury as gusts of wind, that had got in by mistake. It is impossible for any woman to

make a man of that nature unhappy. He would have been happier, I dare say, and have done much more for the good of the world, if he had married a peaceful woman; but I know very little of those matters. Only, as you have an ordinary mind, be sure that you marry a sweet-tempered woman. To bed, my boy, to bed! We must be up right early."

CHAPTER XV.

MORAL SUPPORT.

In spite of all said to the contrary, I believe that young people, upon the whole, are more apt to ponder than the old folk are. At least, if to ponder means—as it should—to weigh in the balance of pros and cons the probable results of their own doings. The old man remembers the time he has lost, in thinking thoughts that came to naught; and he sees that if they had come to much, that much would have been very little now. The young man has plenty of time on his hands, and believes he is going to do wonders with it, and makes a bright map of his mighty course in life. And this is the wisest thing that he can do.

But when he falls in love, alas! his ripe wisdom is seldom applied to himself. Like a roguish grocer, with a magnet in his counter, he brings the scale down to his own liking;

but he differs from him, in that he cheats himself.

Being very wise in my own eyes, I pondered very carefully my next step; not with any thought of retiring, but with a firm resolve to advance in the strongest and most effective manner. My Uncle's long story, instead of damping, had added hot fuel to my ardour, and compassion had lent a deeper tone to passion. Tender pictures arose before me of my angelic Kitty, starved, and tortured, and snubbed, and trampled, and (worst of all perhaps to a female body) shabbily, and grotesquely dressed. Such a woman as my Uncle had described was enough to drive the largest-minded man to fury, and to grind the sweetest of her own sex, into fragments of misery and despair. The one crumb of comfort I could pick up, was that such cruelty must make my darling pine all the more for tender love, and long perpetually for some refuge, however humble it might be. But the point of all points was—how should I get at her?

All these things were passing through my mind for about the thousandth time—yet all in vain—as I came back from Chertsey, on old *Spanker's* back, a day or two later in that same

week. Old *Spanker* was as good a horse as ever tasted corn; and when we got together, we always seemed to fall into very much the same vein of thought. Not that *Spanker* had any love-troubles, but plenty of other cares and considerations, which brought him into tune with me, as we jogged along. If anything went amiss on our premises, *Spanker* seemed to find it out, not one of us knew how, and to feel a friendly sadness for us, though it never affected his appetite. So warm was his interest in our affairs, that whenever he took a load to Covent Garden, the proper thing always was to let him know how it had been disposed of; and Selsey Bill declared that he came home with his ears pricked forward, or laid back, according as the prices had been up or down. But Selsey Bill, with seventeen hungry children, was himself as sympathetic as almost any horse.

It was very nigh dark; for the days were drawing in, being nearly come to the equinox, and the weather breaking up, as we had foreseen. Indeed but for that, I should not have been here, for my Uncle would never have sent me to Chertsey, if the fruit had been fit to be gathered to-day. "Never gather any fruit when it is wet, except a horse-chestnut," he

used to say; "and you may find the flavour of that improved." But the rain had not been so very heavy, only just enough to hang on things and make them sticky; and now there was a strong wind getting up, which was likely to fetch down a hundred bushels.

The river was no longer in high flood, though still over its banks, and turbulent; and I had not to ride through great stretches of water, as our roads require one to do, even if they let him pass at all, when the Thames comes down at its utmost. When I was a lad in 1852, we could scarcely go anywhere without swimming. And now, without floods, I very nearly had to swim; for old *Spanker* stopped as suddenly as if he had been shot, in a dark place, where there was a ditch beside the road; and I, riding carelessly and mooning on my grievances, was as loose on his back as my hat on my head. I just saved myself from flying over his ears, and then flourished my whip-stock, for I thought it was a footpad.

"Don't be a fool, Kit. You have done a little too much of that to me already."

The voice was well known to me, and the glimmering light showed the figure of Sam Henderson. He had a contemptuous manner of

putting his heels on the earth, with his toes turned up and out; as if the world were not worth riding, except with a reckless attitude. But I was vexed to be pulled up like this, and nearly cast out of the saddle. Therefore I said something of his own sort.

"Young man, you don't value my good intentions; and you are not at all charmed with my new dodge, for fetching a horse up before he can think. You saw I never touched your bridle. Well, never mind that. I'm not going to teach you. How are things going on, at your crib, my boy?"

"Famously;" I answered, for it was not likely that I should discourse of my troubles to him. "Nothing could be better, Mr. Henderson; and since you have proved your new dodge satisfactory, I will say 'Good night,' and beg you not to do it to me again."

"What a confounded muff you are!" he continued with his slangy drawl, which he had picked up perhaps at Tattersall's; "do you think that I would have come down this beastly lane, on a dirty night like this, without I had something important to say? How about your Kitty?"

This was a little too familiar, and put me on

my dignity. At the same time it gave me a thrill of pleasure, as a proof of the public conclusion upon a point of deep private interest.

"If you happen to mean, in your cheeky style, a young lady known as Miss Fairthorn, and the niece of Miss Coldpepper, of the Hall; I can only tell you that she is in London, with her father, the celebrated Captain Fairthorn."

"A pinch for stale news—as we used to say at school. Perhaps I could give you a fresher tip, my boy; but I dare say you don't care to hear it. Perhaps you have put your money on another filly. So have I; and this time it is a ripper."

Little as I liked his low manner of describing things too lofty for his comprehension, I could not let him depart like this. He lit a cigar under *Spanker's* nose, as if he had been nobody, and whistling to his bull-terrier Bob, turned away as if everything was settled. But I called him back sternly, and he said, "Oh well, if you want to hear more, you must turn into my little den down here."

I followed him through a white gate which he opened in the high paling that fenced his paddocks, and presently we came to a long low building, more like a shed than a dwelling-house, but having a snug room or two at one

end. "This is my doctor's shop," he said; "and it serves for a thousand other uses. No patients at present—will be plenty by and by. Come into my snuggery, and have something hot. I will send a fellow home with your old screw, and tell the Governor not to expect you to supper. Rump-steak and onions in ten minutes, Tom, and a knife and fork for this gentleman! Now, Kit, put your trotters on the hob, but have a pull first at this pewter."

This was heaping coals of fire on my head, after all that I had done to him; and I said something clumsy to that effect. He treated it as if it were hardly worth a word; and much as I love to be forgiven, I like to have done it to others much better.

"I never think twice of a thing like that;" he replied, without turning to look at me. "A fellow like you who never sees a bit of life gets waxy over nothing, and makes a fool of himself. You hit straight, and I deserved it. I live among horses a deal too much to bear ill-will, as the humans do. Let us have our corn, my boy; and then I will tell you what I heard in Town to-day, and you can grind it between your wisdom teeth."

In spite of all anxiety, I did well with the

victuals set before me; and Sam was right hospitable in every way, and made me laugh freely at his short crisp stories, with a horse for the hero, and a man for the rogue, or even a woman in some cases. I endeavoured to match some of them with tales of our own nags; but those he swept by disdainfully. No horse was worth talking of below the rank of thoroughbred; as a story has no interest, until we come to the Earls, and the Dukes, and the Marquises.

"Now," said Sam Henderson, when the plates were gone, and glasses had succeeded them; "Kit Orchardson, you are a very pleasant fellow; considering how little you know of the world, I never thought there was so much in you. Why, if you could get over your shyness, Kit, you would be fit for very good society. But it is a mistake on the right side, my boy. I would much rather see a young chap like that, than one of your bumptious clodhoppers. I suppose I am the only man in Sunbury who ever goes into high society. And I take good care that it never spoils me. There's not a Lord on the Turf that won't shake hands with me, when he thinks I can put him up to anything. But you can't say I am stuck up, can you now?"

"Certainly not," I declared with warmth, for his hospitality was cordial; "you keep to your nature through the whole of it. It would spoil most of us to have so much to do with noblemen."

"You and I should see more of one another," Sam answered, with gratification beaming in his very keen and lively eyes; "and if ever you would put a bit of Uncle Corny's tin upon any tit at long odds, come to me. The finest tip in England free, gratis, and for nothing. But I called you in for a different sort of tip. When I was at the Corner this afternoon, who should I see but Sir Cumberleigh Hotchpot? I dare say you may have heard of him. No? Very well, that proves just what I was saying. You are as green as a grasshopper looking at a cuckoo. 'Pot,' as we call him—and it fits him well, for his figure is that, and his habits are black—is one of the best-known men in London, and one of the worst to have much to do with. 'Holloa, Sam,' he says, 'glad to see you. What'll you take for your old *Sinner* now?' *Sinner*, you must know, is my old mare *Cinnaminta*, the dam of more winners than any other mare alive; and the old rogue knows well enough that I would sooner sell my shadow,

even if he had sixpence to put on it. He gives himself out to be rolling in money, but all he ever rolls in is the gutter. Well, sir, we got on from one thing to another; and by and by I gave him just a little rub about a hatful of money I had won of him at Chester, and never seen the colour of. 'All right,' he says, 'down upon the nail next week. Haven't you heard what's up with me?' So I told him no, and he falls to laughing, enough to shake the dye out of his grizzly whiskers. 'Going to buckle to. By Gosh, I mean it,' says he; 'and the sweetest young filly as ever looked through a riband. Rejoices in the name of Kitty Fairthorn, just the very name for a winner of the Oaks. Ha, ha, wish me joy, old chap. She was down your way, I am told, last week. But I had spotted her before that, Sam.' I was thrown upon my haunches, as you may fancy, Kit; but I did not let him see it; though to think of old Crumbly Pot going in for such a stunner—'Rhino, no doubt,' I says; and he says, 'By the bucketful! Her dad is a buffer who can sit down and coin it in batteries. And only this kid to put it on; the others belong to a different stable. Think of coming for the honeymoon, down to your place. They tell me you keep the

big crib empty.' Well, I only shook my head at that, for the old rogue never pays his rent; and I asked him when it was to be pulled off. 'Pretty smart,' he said; but the day not named, and he must go first to Lincolnshire, to see about his property there; which I happen to know is up the spout to its outside value, though he always talks big on the strength of it. And no doubt he has got over your grand Professor, with his baronetcy and his flourishing estates. That's about the tune of it, you may swear, Kit. Well, how do you like my yarn, my boy?"

"Sam, it shall never come off;" I cried, with a stamp which made the glasses jingle, and the stirrup-irons that hung on the wall rattle as if a mad horse were between them. "I would rather see that innocent young creature in her coffin than married to such a low brute. Why, even if she married you, Sam, although it would be a terrible fall, she would have a man, and an honest one comparatively to deal with. But as to the Crumbly Pot, as you call him——"

"Well, old fellow, you mean well," replied Henderson with tranquillity; "though your compliments are rather left-handed. But you may look upon me, Kit, as out of the running.

I was taken with the girl, I won't deny it. But she didn't take to me, and she took to you. And between you and me, I am as sure as eggs that she hasn't got sixpence to bless herself. That wouldn't suit my book; and I am no plunger."

"She wants no sixpence to bless herself. She is blest without a halfpenny. And a blessing she will be to any man who deserves her, although there is none on the face of this earth——"

"Very well, very well—stow all that. A woman's a dark horse, even to her own trainer. But I've met with just as fine a bit of stuff, a lovely young filly down at Ludred. She's the only daughter of the old man there; and if ever I spotted a Derby nag, he has got the next one in his string this moment. I have not quite made up my mind yet; but I think I shall go in for her. At any rate I'm off with the Fairthorn lay. Why, there's a cuss of a woman to deal with there, who'd frighten a dromedary into fits, they say. I wonder if old Pot knows about it. But Pot shan't have her, if I can help it; and you may trust me for knowing a thing or two. Come, let's strike a bargain, Kit, and stick to it like men. Will

you help me with the Ludred job, if I do all I can for you in the Fairthorn affair? Give me your hand on it, and I am your man."

I told him that I did not see at all how I could be of any service to him, in his scheme on the young lady he was thinking of. But he said that I could help him as much as I liked; for a relative of mine lived in that village, an elderly lady, and highly respected, as she occupied one of the best houses in the place; and more than that, it belonged to her. It was some years now since I had seen her, but she had been kind to me when I was at school; and Sam proposed that I should look her up, and give a bright account of him, and perhaps do more than that; for the young lady visited at her house, and valued her opinion highly. I now perceived why Henderson had become so friendly, and was able to trust him, as he had a good motive. Moreover I had heard of his "lovely filly," and even seen her when she was a child; and I knew that her father (the well-known Mr. Chalker) had made a good fortune in the racing business, and perhaps would be apt to look down upon Sam, from the point of higher standing and better breeding. Being interested now in all true

love, I readily promised to do all I could, and then begged for Sam's counsel in my own case.

"Take the bull by the horns;" he said with his usual briskness. "Never beat about the bush; that's my plan, Kit. Go up, and see the Governor, and say—'I love your daughter; I hear she is awfully sat upon at home, and doesn't even get her corn regular. She has taken a great liking to me; I know that. And although I am not a great gun, and am terribly green, my Uncle Corny is a warm old chap; and I shall have all his land and money, when he croaks. You see, Governor, you might do worse. And as for old Pot, if you knew the old scamp, you'd sooner kill your girl than let him have her. Why, he can't even square his bets; and all his land in Lincolnshire is collared by the Moseys. Hand her to me, and I'll make her a good husband, and you shall come to our place, and live jolly, when you can't stand your devil of a wife no longer.' Kit, I'll write it down for you, if you like. You say all that to him, exactly as I said it; and if you don't fetch him, turn me out to grass in January."

I was much amused that Henderson should call me "green," and yet be in earnest with such absurdity as this; which I recommended

him (since he had s ch faith in it) to learn by heart, and then repeat, with the needful alterations, to the gentleman whose daughter he was anxious now to win. However, though indignant and frightened sadly at the news about that vile baronet, I was pleased on the whole with Sam's behaviour, though not with his last words; which were these, as he left me at the top of the village, and he uttered them with much solemnity—"I say, who stole the dog? Talk of Angels, after that!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TRUE LOVE.

If any one had told me, so lately as last week, that Sam and myself would be sworn allies upon matters of the deepest interest, within fifty years of such a prophecy, I should have considered him as great a liar, as the greatest statesmen of the present period prove themselves daily out of their own mouths. Although I had not then the benefit of knowing, how the most righteous of mankind deceive us, I knew well enough that the world is full of rogues; for no man can visit Covent Garden twice, without having that conviction forced upon him. And Sam Henderson's quiet grins at my "greenness" naturally led me to ponder just a little upon the possibility of his trafficking upon it. However I am glad to say, and still hold to it, that neither then, nor even in my later troubles, which were infinitely deeper than any yet

recounted, did I ever pass into the bitter shadow through which all men are beheld as liars.

The difficulty was to know what to do next. If I did nothing, which was the easiest thing to do—and a course to which my bashfulness and ignorance inclined me—the foulest of all foul wrongs might triumph; the sweetest and most lovable of all the fair beings, who are sent among the coarser lot to renew their faith in goodness, might even by virtue of her own excellence become a sacrifice to villany. I knew that my darling had that strong sense of justice, without which pure gentleness is as a broken reed; and I felt that she also had a keen perception of the good and the bad, as they appear in men. But, alas! I knew also that she loved her father before any one on earth, and almost worshipped him; which he deserved for his character at large, but not so entirely for his conduct to herself. He was always kind and loving to her, when the state of things permitted it; but the bent of his nature was towards peace; and in the strange home, which had swallowed him, there was no peace, either by day or night, if he even dared to show that he loved his own child. The blackest falsehoods were told about her, and the lowest devices

perpetually plied—as I discovered later on—to estrange the father from the daughter, and rob them of their faith in one another. But this part of her story I mean to pass over, with as light a step as possible; for to dwell on such matters stirs the lower part of nature, and angers us without the enlargement of good wrath. We must try to forgive, when we cannot forget, and endeavour not to hope—whenever faith allows us—that the cruel and inhuman may be basted with red pepper, for more than a millennium of the time to come.

But as yet I had none of this clemency in me. Youth has a stronger and far more militant sense of justice, than middle age. I was fired continually with indignation, and often clenched my fists, and was eager to rush at a wall with no door in it, when my Uncle's tale, and Sam's confirmation, came into my head like a whirlwind. "What a fool I am, what a helpless idiot!" I kept on muttering to myself; "the murder will be done, before I move."

I could see no pretext, no prospect whatever, no possibility of interference; and my Uncle (to whom I confided my misery) could only shake his head, and say—"Very bad job, my boy. You must try to make the best of it."

Probably it would have made the worst of me, and left me to die an old bachelor, if it had not been for a little chance, such as no one would think much of. Time was drawing on, without a sign of sunshine in it; when to pick up a very small crumb of comfort, and recall the happiest day I had ever known yet, I went to my cupboard, and pulled out a simple sketch in water colours, which I had made of the stricken pear-tree; after some one had made of it the luckiest tree that ever died. She had not finished her work of art, partly through sweet talk with me; and I hoped to surprise her and compare our portraits, when she should come to complete her drawing. Now as I glanced, and sighed, and gazed, and put in a little touch with listless hands, my good genius stood behind me, in the form of a little old woman, holding in one hand a bucket, and in the other a scrubbing-brush.

"Lor', how bootiful 'e have dooed 'un!" Tabby Tapscott cried, as if she would like to have a turn at it with her reeking brush. "A can zee every crinkle crankum of they leaveses, and a girt bumble-drum coom to sniff at 'un. Her cudn't do 'un half so natteral as thiccy, if her was to coom a dizen taimes, for kissy-kissy

talk like. Think I didn't clap eyes upon 'e both? Good as a plai it wor, and the both of 'e vancying nobbody naigh! Lor', I niver zee nort more amoosin!"

"Then all I can say is, you ought to have that bucket of slops thrown over you. What business of yours, you inquisitive old creature?"

"That be vaine manners after arl as I dooed, to vetch 'un here, for you to carr' on with! Ha, ha, ha, I cud tell 'e zummat now, if so be I was mainded to. But I reckon 'e wud goo to drow boocket auver Tabby?"

This renewed my courtesy at once, for I had great faith in Tabby's devices; and after some coying, and the touch of a crooked sixpence, she told me her plan, which was simplicity itself, so that I wondered at my own dulness. I was to find out where Captain Fairthorn lived, which could be done with the greatest ease; and then to call and make a point of seeing him, on the plea of presenting him with a perfect copy, such as his daughter had no time to finish. Who could tell that good luck might not afford me a glimpse at, or even a few words with, the one who was never absent from my mind? And supposing there were no such bliss as that, at least I could get some tidings of her, and pos-

sibly find a chance of doing something more. Be it as it might, I could make things no worse; and anything was better than this horrible suspense. I consulted my Uncle about this little scheme, and he readily fell in with it; for he could not bear to see me going about my work as if my heart were not in it, and searching the papers in dread of bad news every morning. And finding that I could be of use to him in London, he proposed that I should go that very night in the fruit-van, with Selsey Bill, and the thief-boy—that is to say, the boy who kept watch against thieves, of whom there are scores in the market.

When I found my way, towards the middle of the day, to that wild weald—as it then was—of London, which is now a camp of Punch-and-Judy boxes strung with balconies, it took me some minutes to become convinced that I was not in a hop-ground turned upside down. Some mighty contractor was at work in a breadth and depth of chaos; and countless volcanoes of piled clay, which none but a demon could have made to burn, were uttering horizontal fumes, not at all like honest smoke in texture, but tenfold worse to cope with. Some thousands of brawny navvies, running on planks

(at the head-pirate's order) with skeleton barrows before them, had contrived (with the aid of ten thousand tin pots) to keep their throats clear and their insides going. Not one of them would stop to tell me where I was; all gave a nod and went on barrowing; perhaps they were under conditions, such as occur to most of us in the barrow-drive of life, when to pause for a moment is to topple over.

After shouting in vain to these night-capped fellows, I saw through the blue mist of drifting poison, a young fellow, perhaps about twenty-one, who seemed to be clerk of the works, or something; and I felt myself fit to patronise him, being four or five years his elder, and at least to that amount his bigger. But for his better he would not have me, and snapped in such a style that I seemed to belong almost to a past generation. "Fairthorn?" he said. "Yes, I may have heard of him. Elderly gent—wears goggles, and goes in for thunderbolts. Don't hang out here, stops business. Three turns to the left, and ask the old applewoman."

I was much inclined to increase his acquaintance with apples, by giving him one to his eye—external, and not a treasure; but before I could even return his contempt, he

was gone, and left me in the wilderness. At last I found a boy who was looking after pots, and for twopence he not only led me truly, but enlightened me largely as to this part of the world. He showed me where the "Great Shebissun" was to be, and how all the roads were to be laid out, and even shook his head (now twelve years old) as to the solvency of this "rum rig." He dismissed me kindly—with his salary doubled—at the gate of the great philosopher; and with his finger to his nose gave parting counsel.

"Best not go in, young man. The old codger can blow you to bits, by turning a handle, and the old cat 'll scratch your wig off. But there's a stunnin' gal—ah, that's what you're after! I say, young covey, if you're game for a bit of sweet'artin' on the sly, I'll show yer the very nick for it." He pointed to a gate between two old trees, and overhung with ivy. "How does I know?" he said, anticipating briskly any doubt on my part; "s'help me taters, it's the only place round here as I never took a pot of beer to."

Anxious as I was, I smiled a little at this criterion of a trysting-place, and then did my utmost to fix in mind the bearings of this

strange neighbourhood. Although I knew the busy parts of London well enough, of the vast spread of outskirts I knew little, except the ups and downs of the great roads through them, and here and there a long look-out from the top of Notting Hill, or any other little eminence. Even so I had only lost my eyes in a mighty maze of things to come, and felt a deep wonder of pity for the builders, who were running up houses they could never fill. The part I was now exploring lay between the two great western roads, and was therefore to me an unknown land. But I felt pretty sure that the house now before me had been quite lately a mere country mansion, with grounds not overlooked, and even meadows of its own, where cows might find it needful to low to one another, and a horse might go a long way to find a gate to scratch against.

Even now there was a cattle-pond (the dregs of better days) near the gate that led up from the brickfields ; and half a dozen ancient Scotch firs leaned in a whispering attitude towards one another ; perhaps they alone were left of a goodly group, trembling at every axe that passed. The house itself was long, low, and red, and full of little windows, upon whose sills

a straggling ilex leaned its elbows here and there, and sparrows held a lively chivvy. There was not a flower in the beds in front, and the box-edging of the walks was as high and broad as a wheel-barrow. Two large cedars, one at either corner of the sodden grass-plot, looked like mighty pencils placed to mark the extent of the building.

Descrying no one (except an ancient dog of mighty stature, and of some race unknown to me, who came up in a friendly manner) I summoned all my courage, with good manners at the back of it, and pulled a great bell-handle hanging, like a butcher's steelyard, between two mossy piers of stone. There was no sound of any bell inside, and I was counting the time for another pull, when the door was opened some few inches, and sharp black eyes peered out at me.

"Subscription Bible? No, thank you, young man. Cook was put into County-court last time."

I did not know what she meant, until I saw that she was glancing at the poor portfolio, of my own make, which held my unpretentious drawing. "I am not come for any subscription," I said, drawing back from the door, as

she seemed to suspect that I would try to push it open. "I have the pleasure of knowing Captain Fairthorn, and I wish to see him."

"Don't think you can," she answered sharply; "but if you will tell me what your business is, I will ask the Mistress about it. You may come, and wait here, while I go to her. Scrape your boots first, and don't bring in any clay."

This did not sound very gracious; but I obeyed her orders with my best smile, and producing two very fine pears, laid them on the black marble chimney-piece of the hall. Her sallow face almost relaxed to a smile.

"Young man from the country? Well, take a chair a minute, while I go and ask for orders about you." With these words she hastened up an old oak staircase, and left me at leisure to look about.

The hall was a large but not lofty chamber, panelled with some dark wood, and hung with several grimy paintings. Two doors at either end led from it, as well as the main staircase in the middle, and a narrow stone passage at one corner. The fireplace was large, but looked as if it had more to do with frost than fire; and the day being chilly and very damp, with an

east wind crawling along the ground, I began to shiver, for my feet were wet from the wilderness of clay I had waded through. But presently the sound of loud voices caught my ear, and filled me with hot interest.

One of the doors at the further end was not quite closed, and the room beyond resounded with some contention. "What a fool you are to make such a fuss!" one feminine voice was exclaiming—"Oh, don't reason with her," cried another, "the poor stupe isn't worth it. The thing is settled, and so what is the use of talking? How glad I shall be to see the last of her wicked temper and perpetual sulks. And I am sure you will be the same, Jerry. Nothing surprises me so much as Mamma's wonderful patience with her. Why, she hasn't boxed her ears since Saturday!"

"It isn't only that," replied the first; "but, Frizzy, consider the indulgences she has had. A candle to go to bed with, almost every night, and a sardine, positively one of our sardines, for her dinner, the day before yesterday. Why, she'll want to be dining with us, the next thing! The more she is petted, the worse she gets. Now don't you aspire to dine with us, you dear, you darling, don't you now?"

"I am sure I never do," replied a gentle voice, silvery even now, though quivering with tears; "I would rather have bread and water by myself in peace, than be scolded, and sneered at, and grudged every mouthful. Oh, what have I done to deserve it all?"

"I told you what would come of reasoning with her," said the one who had been called "Frizzy"—probably Miss Euphrasia Bulwrag; "it simply makes her outrageous, Jerry. Ever since she came back from Sunbury, there has simply been no living with her. And she looks upon us as her enemies, because we are resolved that she shall do what is best for her. Lady Hotchpot—what can sound better? And then she can eat and drink all day long, which seems to be all she cares for."

"That's a little mistake of yours," answered Miss Jerry, or Geraldine; "I know her tricks even better than you do. She cares for something, or somebody, some clodhopper, or chawbacon, down in that delightful village. Why, you can't say 'Sunbury,' in the most innocent manner, without her blushing furiously. But she's so cunning—I can't get out of her who the beloved chawbacon is. Come now, Kitty, make a clean breast of it. I believe it's the

fellow that bets down there, and lives by having families of horses. Sir Cumberleigh told me all about him, and had a rare laugh; you should have seen him laugh, when I said that our Kitty was smitten. Well, I hoped she had a little more principle than that. And you'd think that butter wouldn't melt in her mouth?"

"Butter never gets a chance"—I heard my darling say, and knew by her voice that the sweetest temper in the world was roused at last —"your mother never lets it go into my mouth; while you have it thicker than your bread almost. But I'll thank you to enjoy among yourselves, or with any old rake you may fawn upon, your low and most ignorant gossip about me. You had better not strike me. Your mother may. But I will not take it from either of you; nor from both together."

I could scarcely contain myself, I assure you; and if the young tyrants had fallen upon her, I must have got into a nice position—in the old, but not in the new sense of "nice"—that of bodily conflict with women. Luckily however these were cowards, as behoved such creatures; and I verily believe that my Angel (if driven—as no Angel should be—into a free fight) would have made a bad record of both of them.

I was hovering, as it were, upon my legs, burning to dash into the room, yet shuddering at the strange intrusion, when Miss Fairthorn came out very quietly, and holding her handkerchief to her streaming eyes. The door was banged behind her, as if by a kick, and a loud contemptuous laugh came through it. What I did is a great deal more than I can tell; for I must have been carried far beyond myself, by pity, indignation, and ardent love.

"Oh, don't!" said Kitty, as I stood before her, almost before she could have used her eyes, being overcome with weeping; but the glance she gave me had told the thing that I cared for most in earth or heaven. And the strangest point was that we felt no surprise at being together in this wondrous way. To me it seemed right that she should fall into my arms; and to her it seemed natural that I should drop from heaven. "Oh, don't!" said Kitty, but she let me do it.

I kissed away her tears, and I cannot tell you whether they gave me more bliss or pain; I stroked her softly nestling hair, as if it all belonged to me; and I played with her pretty fingers, putting them one by one between my great things, to make the thrilling process last.

Then I looked once more into her lovely eyes—the wells of all my life-springs now—and lo, their tears were flown; and hope, and woman's faith, and heaven's own love, were beaming from their lustrous depth, as the light that proves the jewel true!

"Darling of my life," was all I said; and she only answered—

"Yes, dear."

CHAPTER XVII.

TRUE FATHER.

Now anybody may suppose, who looks at things too sensibly, that true love never yet has chosen time and place more foolishly, for coming to grand issue, and obtaining pledge for ever. The sour-faced woman might have returned in the crisis of our doings, or the two young tyrants might have broken forth, and made sport of us from the parlour. Whether we knew these things or not, we never gave a thought to them; all we thought of was one another, and the rest might think what they liked of us. This is not a large way to look at things; and yet once in a life, the largest.

My Kitty—as I called her now, and have never since wanted any other name—was the first (as behoved the more sensitive one) to bring common sense to bear on us.

"You must come and see my father, dear,"

she whispered with her hands in mine; "I am sure that he loves me all he can. And if you have quite made up your mind that you cannot do without me, we may trust him to make the best of it; for he always makes the best of things."

"Show me where he is," I answered, scarcely yet believing that my fortune was so glorious; while she looked at me as only one in the world can ever look at us; "I fear that he will be sadly vexed; but he is kind to every one."

"He will not be vexed on his own account, nor yet on mine," she answered very quietly; "but nobody knows what he has to bear. Let us go to him, while he is by himself. There is some one coming; we must be quick."

We hastened down the long stone passage, just in time to escape the servant, who at last had found her mistress; and after passing several doors, we came to one with an iron bar, and iron rails, in front of it.

"See how he has to protect himself! If somebody knew that I have this key, it would very soon be torn from me. I dare say you are surprised; such things are not done down at Sunbury. How I love that quiet place!"

"And you shall live there all your life," I

answered as we passed the barrier; "no one shall dare to insult you there; you shall be the Queen, the Queen of all; and you know who will be your slave of slaves."

"That is all very fine talk," she said; "I believe it is the usual style at first; and then we come to Bramah locks, and cold iron."

But her smile, as she put her hand on my shoulder, proved that her own heart taught her better.

"Let me go in first, and see what he is doing. Oh, Kit, you have taken advantage enough. What right have you to say that it is your last chance? I am sure I hope not. Oh, how mean of you to turn my own words against me! Now have a little reason. Yes, yes, yes. For the fiftieth time at least, in five minutes—I love you, and never will have anybody else. Now let me go in first; sometimes he is too busy for even me to interrupt him."

Much against my will, I let her go, for half an hour later would have done as well according to my judgment; and after securing the fence behind us, which had wholly escaped my attention, she knocked at the door of the inner room, and without being answered opened it.

Her father was sitting with his back to us,

so intent upon some small object that he did not hear our footsteps. Some instrument made of brass and glass, but quite unlike a microscope, was in his left hand, and with the other he was slowly revolving something. The appearance of the room amazed me, with its vast multitude of things unknown to me even by name or shape, but all looking full of polished mischief and poisonous intelligence.

"This is why my Kitty weeps, and is starved and crushed by female dragons," I said to myself in bitter mood; and even the Professor's grand calm head, and sweet scientific attitude, did not arouse the reverence, which a stranger would have felt for him.

His daughter touched, as lightly as a frond of fern might touch it, one of his wavering silver locks, and waited with a smile for him to turn. But I saw that her bosom trembled, with a sigh of deeper birth than smiles. Then he turned and looked at her, and knew from the eyes, that were so like his own, and yet so deeply different, that she had something he must hear.

"You have been crying again, my child," he said as he kissed her forehead; "they promised me you should be happy now."

"Yes, if I let them do what they like.

Father, you have no idea what it is. I am never allowed to see you alone, except by stealth, and at fearful risk. Father, come out of philosophy and science, and attend to your own child."

"But, my dear, I do. It is the very thing that is in my mind continually. I spoke very strongly not a week ago, and received a solemn promise that you should have new clothes, and diet the same as the rest, and everything I could think of for your good."

"How many times have they promised it, father? And then I am beaten and put on bread and water, for having dared to complain to you. But all that is a trifle, a thing soon over. I must expect that sort of thing, because I have no mother. But, father, what they are trying to do to me is ten times worse than ragged clothes, or starvation, or bodily punishment. They want me to marry a man I detest —an old man, and a bad one!"

"My dear, I have promised you, and you know that you can rely on my promises, that you shall not even be allowed to marry a man of doubtful character. I have not been able, my darling Kitty, to do everything I should have liked for you; but one thing is certain—if en-

quiries prove that this gentleman—I forget his name—is a man of bad life and unkind nature, you shall have nothing to do with him. You know how little I am able now to go into what is called 'Society,' and most of my friends are men of my own tastes. But I have taken particular trouble, at the loss of much important time, to ascertain whether your opinion of this person is correct. He is wealthy and of good family, I am told, though that is merely a secondary point. He is likely to have outlived youthful follies; and the difference of age is in your favour."

"But not in his"—interrupted Kitty, with a smile, for which I could have kissed her fifty times, it was so natural, and simple, yet sagacious.

"You are flippant, my dear, in spite of all your troubles;" continued her father, smiling also. "No length of discipline has entirely tamed you. And now I will tell you why I am so anxious that you should have a settled home, and some one to take care of you, as soon as can suitably be arranged. I am likely to leave England, on a roving expedition, for how long a time is as yet uncertain. It may be for a twelvemonth, or even more, possibly for two years; and all that time, where will you be, my

darling child? I know that you are not happy now; though my object in making this second arrangement was mainly to have you protected and cared for. But things have not turned out exactly as I had hoped; and I fear that in my absence they may grow still worse. When I heard that this gentleman was strongly attached to you, and wished you to become his wife this winter, I hoped that I might be of some little service to the cause of knowledge, without any neglect of my duty to you. And I may tell you, my child, that through a long course of rather extravagant habits, which I have failed to check, it is become of great importance to me, so far as mere money goes—which is not much—to accept the appointment which is offered me. I am often deeply grieved at your condition, and do my very utmost to improve it; but am not always allowed; as you know, my dear, and are very sweet and patient with me—I am not always allowed to have my own way."

"Don't put it so, Papa. That is not half the truth. Say that you never have been allowed, never are, and never will be, to have so much as a barleycorn of your own way."

"Young people put things in too strong a

light;" the man of science answered gently. "But we will not go into that question now. Only you will see, my dear, from what I have said, why I am so anxious that you should be settled in a happy and peaceful home of your own, far away from all those who worry you. This gentleman offers you a wealthy home; but knowing your nature I do not insist on that. Indeed I should be quite satisfied with a very humble home for my darling, if it were a happy one."

"Very well, Papa, nothing could be nicer. I can please you now exactly, and meet all your wishes, though I cannot bear to hear of your leaving me so long. But you will not leave me to the tender mercies"—here my Kitty beckoned to me to come forward, which I had long been most eager to do, but in obedience to her signals, had remained by the door and behind a tall case of some wheel within wheel-work, almost as complex as human motives—"father, you see that you need not leave me to the tender mercies of anybody, except this gentleman, who saved my life at Sunbury, as you know, and wishes to make it a part of his own, for the rest of it."

Captain Fairthorn looked at me with extreme

surprise; my idea of his character was that nothing upon or below the earth could surprise him. But he had his glasses on; and these always seem to me to treble the marks of astonishment in the eyes that stand behind them. In deference to his large intellect, and fame, and great (though inactive) nobility of nature, I waited for him to begin, though I am sure—now I come to think of it—that he would have been glad for me to take the move.

"Kitty," he said at last, with some relief at not having to fall upon me yet, "I should like to know a little more of this story. I remember this young man very well. But his name has escaped me for the moment. He will not think me rude. It is one of the many penalties we pay for undue devotion to our own little subjects. If he had been a zoophyte, or a proboscidian, or even one of the constituents——"

"If he had been a zoophyte, Papa, or anything else with a very big name, and a very little meaning," Miss Fairthorn exclaimed in reproachful tones, "where should I be now? At the bottom of the Thames. And perhaps you would enjoy dredging for me."

"In spite of all training, she has a temper;"

the father addressed this remark to me. "Also she has a deep sense of gratitude—a feeling we find the more largely developed, the further we travel from the human order. But, my dear, you allow yourself vague discursions. In a matter like this you have brought before me, my desire is always to be practical. That great and original investigator, to whom we owe not only knowledge, but what is even more important, the only true course, by which to arrive——"

"My dear father, if you once begin on that—the knowledge we want, and a quick course to it, is whether you will be so good and so kind, as to make us both happy by your consent. This gentleman loves me; and I love him. He is not wealthy; but he is good. You may leave me in his care, without a doubt. I have not known him long; but I know him as truly, as if we had been brought up together. The only fault he has is that he cannot praise himself. And his reverence for you is so strong and deep, that it makes him more diffident than ever. You are dreadfully diffident yourself, Papa, you know you are; and that makes me so despise all boastful people. Now fully understand that I won't have that horrible old

Sir Cumbrous Hotchpot, and I will have this Kit Orchardson; that is to say, with your leave, father. And you owe me something, I should think, after all—but I have no right to speak of that. Only, if you don't give it, mind, I'll—I'll——" As a sample of what she would do, she began to sob deeply; and I caught her in my arms.

"You see, sir," I said—"oh, don't, my darling; your father is the kindest man in the world, and he will never have the heart to make you unhappy—you see, sir, how good she is, and how simple, and ready to be satisfied even with me. I am a poor man, and I have my way to make; but with her I could make it to—to——" I was going to say "heaven," but substituted, "the top of the tree. And we have a pretty place, where she would be happy as the day is long. And if I don't protect her, and cherish her, and worship her, and keep her as the apple of my eye, I hope you will take me by the neck, Captain Fairthorn, and put me under this air-pump."

"How do you know that is an air-pump?" he asked, with admiration of my cleverness.

"By the look, sir," I replied; "I have seen them before."

"Well then, it isn't; neither does it much resemble one. Kitty, you see what his diffidence is; and another proof, I suppose, is, that he has fallen in love with you?"

"Yes," said my darling, with a smile so humble, and loving, and confiding, that my eyes grew moist, and her father could not see her through his spectacles; "it is a sure proof of his diffidence; for he deserves to have a better wife than I shall ever be; although I will do my best to please him."

"Well, after that," replied Captain Fairthorn, "it seems to me, that my opinion matters very little. You appear to have made up your minds; and your minds appear to have been made for one another. I am wholly unable to withstand such facts. Of course I shall make my enquiries, Master Kit. But so far as I can see at present, I will not deny you what you have won. If she is half as good to her husband as she always has been to her father, you will be a happy man, God willing. There, kiss me, my pretty dear, and don't cry any more, till he makes you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FALSE MOTHER.

Such is the balance of human events—if the phrase be held admissible—that the moment any member of our race is likely to strike the stars with his head sublime, he receives a hard thump upon that protuberance, and comes down with a crown—but a cracked one. As for myself—an unpretentious fellow, and of very simple intellect, though not quite such a fool as the world considered me in my later troubles,—desiring always to tell the truth, I will not deny that I walked on air, when I found myself gifted with my Kitty's love, and her large-hearted father's assent to it. It had been arranged that I must wait, and keep my bliss inside my waistcoat, until such time as slower prudence and clearer foresight might prescribe. But all I thought of were the glorious facts that Kitty loved me as I loved

her, and that her father, who alone could enter sound denial, would not deny. "What do I care for that old Step-mother?" I said to myself, as I buttoned my coat.

That coat was henceforth sacred to me. There may have been smarter and grander coats, coats with more tone of high art about them, and of sleeker and richer substance. But this coat was enriched for ever with at least three tears from Kitty's eyes, Kitty's lovely hair had fallen like a vernal shower upon it, and her true heart had quivered to it, when she owned whose heart it was. I knew that it might be my duty now to start a new coat of loftier order, to keep me abreast of my rise in the world, as the son of a celebrated man; nevertheless this would be the coat to look back upon and look up to, as it hung upon a holy peg, with the pockets full of lavender.

I had said farewell to my dear love, and was just beginning to think how I would come it over Uncle Corny, telling him a bit, and then another bit, and leading him on to laugh at me, until I should come out with news which would make him snap his favourite pipe—when suddenly, near the Captain's gate, I felt a sharp tug from behind. The dusk was gathering,

and I meant to put my best foot foremost, and walk all the way to Sunbury, scarcely feeling the road beneath my feet.

"What do you want, little chap?" I asked, for it was not in my power then to speak rudely to any living creature, although I was vexed at losing time.

"If you please, young man, my lady says that you are to come back and speak to her. You are to come with me to the door over there. And you must be careful how you scrape your boots."

I looked at the boy, and felt inclined to laugh. He was dressed in green from head to foot, and two or three dozen gilt buttons shone in a double row down the front of him. For a moment I doubted about obeying, until it occurred to me that if I refused, my sin might be visited upon another. So I turned and followed the page, who seemed to think disobedience impossible. He led me to a door at the west end of the house, and then up a little staircase to a fine broad passage, with statues and pictures looking very grand indeed. Before I could take half of it into my mind, he opened a door with carved work upon it, and showed me into the grandest room I had

ever entered, except in show places, such as Hampton Court, or Windsor Castle. All this part of the house was so different from the other end that I was amazed, when I came to think of it.

But I could not think now of floors and ceilings, or even chairs and tables, as I walked with my best hat in my hand, towards a tall lady very richly dressed, who stood by the mantelpiece, almost like a figure carved upon it. Her thick and strong hair seemed as black as a coal, until one came to look into it; and then it showed an undercast of red, such as I never saw in any other person. Her form was large and robust and full, and as powerful as that of any ordinary man; but the chief thing to notice was her face and eyes. Her face was like those we see cut in shell, to represent some ancient Goddess, such as I read of at Hampton School—Juno, or Pallas, or it may have been Proserpine, my memory is not clear upon those little points—but although I remember a God with two faces, and a dog with three heads, I cannot call to mind any Goddess among them endowed with three chins. "My lady," as the boy in green had called her, certainly did own three fine chins,

as well as a mouth which was too large for the shells, and contemptuous nostrils that seemed to sift the air, and bright eyes with very thick lids for their sheath—and they wanted a sheath, I can tell you—and a forehead which looked as if it could roll, instead of only wrinkling, when the storm of passion swept it.

As yet I was too young to understand that justice and kindness are the only qualities entitling our poor fellow-mortals to respect. I had passed through no tribulation yet, and coped with none of the sorrows, which enlarge, when they do not embitter, the heart. Therefore I was much impressed by this lady's grandeur and fine presence, and made her a clumsy bow, as if I had scarcely a right to exist before her. She saw it, and scorned me, and took the wrong course, as we mostly do when we despise another.

"Do I know your name, young man?" she asked, as if it were very doubtful whether I possessed any name at all. "I seem to have heard of you, but cannot say where."

"In that case," I said, with my spirit returning at the insolent disdain of her eyes and voice, "the boy who came to fetch me has made some mistake. No doubt you wished to

see some other person. I beg you to make no apologies."

With another low bow, I began my retreat, and was very near securing it; for she became too furious to condescend to speak. But two young ladies, whom I had scarcely noticed, jumped up from their chairs, and intercepted me.

"Mamma forgets names so," said one of them, a little plain thing with a mass of curly hair; "but you are Mr. Orchardson, I think, of Sunbury. If so, it is you that Mamma wants to speak to."

"I am not Mr. Orchardson of Sunbury," I answered; "my Uncle Cornelius is the gentleman so known. I am Christopher Orchardson, who only helps him in his business."

"Then, Christopher Orchardson," resumed their mother, as I came back and looked at her quietly, "you seem to have very little knowledge of good manners. Allow me to ask what you are doing in this house."

"I understood that I was sent for, Ma'am; and I am waiting to know what your pleasure is." I saw the girls giggle, and glance at one another, as I delivered this statement.

"None of your trifling with me, young man.

What I insist upon knowing is this. What right had you to enter my house, some hours ago, without my knowledge, and to remain in it, without my permission? Don't fence with the question, but answer it."

"That is easy enough," I replied with my eyes full on hers, which vainly strove to look down mine; "I came to this house, without asking whose it was, to see Captain Fairthorn, with a little sketch of something in which he had taken interest. The servant, or housekeeper, told me to wait, while she went to look for her mistress. Then I met Miss Fairthorn, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting several times before; and she most kindly showed me to her father's room. And I was very glad to find him in good health. After a very pleasant time with him, I was leaving the garden on my way home, when I was told that you wished to see me. I was not rude enough to refuse, and that is why I am in this house again."

"You have made a fine tale of it, but not told the truth. Did you come to my house to see the Professor? Or did you come rather to see his daughter?"

"I came to this house to see Captain Fair-

thorn. But I hoped that I might perhaps have the pleasure of seeing Miss Fairthorn also."

"And what was your motive in wishing to see her? I have a right to ask, as she is in my charge. I stand in the place of a mother to her, whether she is grateful, or whether she is otherwise. What did you wish to see her for?"

I was greatly at a loss to answer this. Not from any shame at the affection, which was the honour and glory of my being, but from dread of the consequences to my precious darling. She saw my hesitation, and burst forth.

"Do you think that I do not know all about it? You have had the gross insolence to lift your eyes to a young lady far above you in every way. You fancy that because she has no mother, and her father is a man of no worldly wisdom, and of extravagant sentiments, a kind of philosopher in short, you will be permitted to reduce her to your inferior rank in life. What are you?—a small market-gardener, or something of that kind, I believe."

"You were kind enough to say just now," I answered, "that you did not know anything about me. Even my name was strange to you. I am not ashamed of my business; and I lay no traps for any one."

"Have you the insolence to refer to me?" Her guilty conscience caught her here, and under its sting she grew so wild that I thought she would have flown at me; though no thought of her had been in my words. "But you are below my contempt, and I wonder that I even deign to speak to you. And I will make short work of it. Go back to your spade, or your heap of manure, or whatever it is you live in, and never dare to think again of Miss Kitty Fairthorn. She is engaged to a gentleman of family, and title, and large property; and I mean to have her married to him very shortly. Go back to your manure-heap; I have done with you."

"Not quite so easily as you think." To her great amazement I approached her, not only without terror, but with calm contempt. "You have a foul scheme in hand, as is widely known, for selling a poor girl, whom you have vilely misused, and starved for some years, and made her life a misery; and you think you will be allowed to sell her to a reprobate old man, who has not even gold enough to cover the blackness of his character. As a girl she has borne your blows; as a woman she would have to bear those of a cowardly and godless scoundrel.

You like plain speaking, and there it is for you. Do you think that God will allow such crimes? I tell you, poor tyrant, that the right will conquer. Miss Fairthorn shall have a happy home, with the affection and kindness, of which you have robbed her; and you—you shall suffer the misery you have inflicted."

Now I had not meant to say a single word of this, and was thoroughly astonished at my own strong language. Bitterly angry with myself as well, for what I felt to be unmanly conduct (even under fiercest provocation), when I saw the effect upon this haughty lady. It must have been many years now, since any one had dared to show her thus what she was like; for her strong will had swept black and white into one—the one she chose to make of them. Weak indolence, and cowardice, a thousandfold more common than the resolute will, had got out of her way, until her way turned to a resistless rush.

She looked at me now, as if utterly unable to believe that her ears could be true to her. Then glancing at one of her daughters, she said, "Geraldine, this young man does not mean it. He has no idea what he is talking about. Take him away, my dear; I feel unwell. I shall be

able to think of things, by and by. Euphrasia, run for the sal volatile, or the Cognac in the square decanter. And then he may come back, and tell me what he means."

This strange turn of mind puzzled me, as much as my straightforward speech had puzzled her. Dr. Sippets—our great man at Sunbury—said, when I spoke of it many years afterwards, that he quite understood, and could easily explain it. To wit, that with people of choleric habit, the vessels of the brain become so charged up to a certain tension, that if anything more —but I had better not try to put his hundred-tun words into my pint pot. He is a choleric man himself; and his vessels might become so charged as to vent themselves in a heavy charge to me. It is enough to say, that when the lady sank, with a face as white as death, upon the sofa, proper feeling told me to depart.

This I was doing, in a sad haze of mind; doubting whether duty did not require that I should halt on the premises, until I had learned how the sufferer passed through her trial. But now another strange thing happened to me, and perhaps the very last I should have dreamed of. I was lingering uneasily near the door, with many pricks of

self-reproach and even shame, when a slim figure glided out and came to me. Although the night had quite fallen now, I could see that it was not my Kitty who came out, but some one much shorter, and smaller altogether. With great anxiety I went to meet her, fearing almost to hear fatal tidings; for who can tell in such a case what may be the end of it?

"You need not be alarmed, Mr. Orchardson," said a voice which I recognised as that of Miss Jerry; "my mother is all right again, and quite ready to have another turn at you, if you are anxious to come back."

"The Lord forbid!" I replied devoutly. "I would run into the hottest of the brick-kilns yonder, rather than meet the good lady again. But I am delighted that it is no worse. It was very kind of you to come and tell me. My best thanks to you, Miss Geraldine."

"It was not that at all," she said with some hesitation; "I did not come to set your mind at ease, though I thought that possibly you might be waiting here; which is very good of you. But I came to say how grateful I am for your behaviour. You have done a lot of good; I cannot tell you half of it. Nobody ever dares to contradict Mamma; that is what

makes her so much what she is. She is very kind and pleasant at the bottom, I am sure. But she has such a very strong will of her own; as a clever man said, when he tried to comfort my dear father many years ago, such a 'very powerful identity,' that every one has always given way before her, until she—until she thinks all the world is bound to do it. You spoke very harshly to her, I know. Perhaps a real gentleman would not have done it; and for the moment I hated you. But she is so delightful to us ever since! We shall have a sweet time of it, for at least a week. But won't Miss Kitty catch it?"

Those last words gave me a bitter pang. This odd girl, who seemed to have some good in her, spoke them, as I thought, with exultation, or at any rate without any sign of sorrow. Her justice, like her mother's, stopped at home.

"If I have done you any good," I said, with faint hopes of getting some little myself, "do promise me one thing; I am sure you will. Try to be kind to Miss Fairthorn, and lighten some little of the burden she has to bear."

"Oh, you don't know her," she answered with a laugh. "You think she is wonderful, I dare say. I can tell you Miss Kitty has a

temper of her own. She is awfully provoking, and she won't be pitied. I believe she hates Frizzy and me, just because we are our mother's daughters. If you ever marry her, you had better look out. However, I will bear with her, as far as human nature can. And now I will say 'Good night.'"

She gave me her hand, which I did not expect; and I saw that she was rather a pretty girl, which I had not noticed in the room. She had fine dark eyes, and her voice was much softer than that of her sister; and it seemed to me that she might come to good, if she got among good people, and away from her terrible mother.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOE DEM. ROE.

When I gave Uncle Corny, as I was bound to do, a full account of that day's work, he was mightily pleased, and clapped me on the back for having spoken so plainly to that haughty woman.

"But now you must make up your mind," he said, "to have the door slammed in your face, if ever you attempt to get a glimpse of your sweetheart there. Poor thing, what a time of it she will have! What puts my back up is to think that her own father lets her be knocked about like that. She never tells him, you think, because it would only get him into trouble, and do her no good. Well, she is a noble girl, if that is the case. But he must know how she is treated, as I told you, in fifty other ways,—badly dressed, half starved, or at any rate fed on rice and suet-pudding, and

kept in the schoolroom away from the others. How was she dressed now? What clothes had she on?"

I answered that I really did not know; and this was the truth, though I blamed myself for it. When first she began to be so much to me, I had noticed how neat and becoming her cloak was, and her hat, and a little tender muff, which held a still tenderer pair of hands. But now that she was all the world to me, and more, I seemed to have no sense of her apparel, but to be filled with herself alone, as if her existence came into mine. I did not tell him that, because he would have cried "Stuff!"

But he understood my meaning, so far as to tell me of a case he had known some years ago. A friend of his had married a lovely girl, who had not a penny to bless herself with, and he was most deeply attached to her. But although he was very well off for money, and not at all of a stingy turn, for a long time it never came into his head that his wife had only two gowns, two bonnets, and one cloak. She was too proud to ask him for money; and instead of doing that went on and on, wearing out all her poor things, until they were scarcely fit to be looked at. And many bitter tears she shed,

as she darned, and patched, and let pieces in, convinced more and more, as the light shone through, that her husband must hate her to keep her like that. And perhaps it would have ended in the ruin of them both, for some villain was making love to her, when luckily a sister of his came to see them, and scolded him roundly for his blind neglect. "Why, bless her heart!" he cried, opening his eyes; "I never see Mary's clothes—I see Mary."

"Now mind you are not such a jackanapes as that;" my Uncle drew the moral, as he rubbed his hands, for he loved to have his stories laughed at; "when you have got your Kitty, and I don't see why you should not, be sure that you praise her dresses and bonnets; not quite so much perhaps as you praise herself, but still every time you can think of it. Women like that sort of thing somehow. I can hardly tell you why; for if any man praised my coat or my hat, I should be vexed with him, unless it was to say that I had got them dirt-cheap. But perhaps the reason is, that a woman's clothes are a part of her mind and her body too, a sort of another self to her."

"How on earth do you know such a lot about women?" I asked, though I thought that

he did not know much. "One would think you had been married for forty years! What woman can have taught you all these things?"

"Mind your own business;" my Uncle answered sharply. "You will have quite enough to do with that, as things appear at present. You have made play with this pretty girl, and you have booked your place with her father. Also you have got over me, who meant to have nothing to do with it. And you have given that hateful woman a Roland for her Oliver. But I will go bail that you have no idea whose shoulders will bear the brunt of it. Who should you say was the trump-card now?"

"The learned Professor," I replied; "the man who could kill that woman with a wire, if he were not so magnanimous. The man who knows everything in this world, except how to manage his own household. He will stand up for me, and I shall win."

"So you shall, my boy; you are quite right there. But it won't be done through him, I can tell you; or you would have a precious time to wait. It shall be done through a small market-gardener—as she had the cheek to call me—and she may grind her teeth, and slap her husband. Very few people know what

I am; because I don't care what they think of me. But I see the proper thing to do, and I mean to begin to-morrow. Now go to bed, and dream as you do all day. You'll be no good to me, till you've had too much of Kitty."

Being weary in body and in mind, I slept until Tabby called out that the breakfast was ready. For this I expected to be well upbraided, as my Uncle was always afoot with the sun; but to my surprise he was not come home, and I kept his rasher hot for him. At last he came in, and sat down without a word beyond his short "Good morning, Kit!" His appetite was fine, and his face most cheerful; though his gray curls appeared a little grimy, and his coat had a smell more peculiar than pleasant.

"Shall have to go under the pump again," he said, as he pushed away his plate; "but it won't matter now till dinner-time. That twitch does make such a sticky smoke, with the sow-thistles whelmed down over it. But the wind was the right way, and took it very level. Bless my soul, how he did cough, and how he ran from one room to another! 'Twas enough to kill American blight a'most, let alone what they call a 'human.' But it's high time to

rouse them up again, my lad; bring one of them runner-sticks, and lend a hand. If he don't bolt by dinner-time, we'll try a little sulphur. I would have done it sooner, if it had not been for the Dutch Honeysuckle, and blue creeper."

Wondering what this device could be, I took a kidney-bean stick and followed him. He marched at a great pace, with a pitchfork on his shoulder, down a long alley of pears and apples; on which, though the leaves hung very late from the wetness of the season, the chill air of some frosty mornings had breathed divers colours. Then we came into an open break, which I had helped to plant with potatoes in the spring, and here were a score of bonfires burning, or rather smoking furiously. Beyond them was "Honeysuckle Cottage," belonging to my Uncle, and standing at the north end of his grounds, against a lane which led to Hanworth.

This cottage had five windows facing us, and receiving the volleys of foul gray smoke, as a smart south-west wind drove it; and the fires being piled with diseased potato-haulm, of which there was abundance in that bad year, as well as bottomed with twitch-grass, beth-

wine, cat's-tail, and fifty other kinds of weed, and still more noxious refuse, the reek was more than any nose could stand, when even a mild puff strayed towards us. But the main and solid mass was rushing, in a flood of embodied stench, straight into the windows of that peaceful cot, penetrating sash and frame and lining. Once or twice as the cloud wisped before the wind, we seemed to catch a brief glimpse of some agitated mortal, holding up his hands in supplication, or wringing them, and applying them in anguish to his nose.

"Pile on some more, Bill, and stir them up again," shouted Uncle Corny, with his pitch-fork swinging in the thick of it. "Agricultural operations must not be suspended to suit the caprice of individuals,—as the County-court judge said, when Noakes tried to stop me from carting manure near his parlour-window. If old Harker won't hearken, we'll make him sniff, eh? See the joke, Selsey Bill?"

Selsey Bill saw it, after deep reflection, and shook his long sides with a longer guffaw. "If a' don't sniff at this, a' must have quare nostrils"—he was wheezing himself, as he clapped on another great dollop of rottenness, and stirred it; "I could never have bided it two

minutes; though the Lord hathn't made me too partiklar. Sure us'll vetch 'un out this time, Maister. Here a' coom'th, here a' coom'th. Lookey see!"

Following his point we descried a little man, timidly opening the cottage door, and apparently testing the smells outside, to compare them with those he was quitting. He glanced at the bonfires, and shook his fist wildly; then threw his skirt over his head, and made off, as if he had smelled quite enough of this world.

"Run and get the key, Bill," my Uncle cried, as soon as he could speak for laughing; "lock the door, and bring the key to me. We'll send for the fire-engine by-and-by, and wash down the front, and then put your wife in, and scrub the whole place out. Beat abroad the fires, men, and throw some earth upon them. That's what I call something like an ejectment. The old rogue has paid no rent since Lady Day; though he had it dirt cheap at three and six a week, and me to pay the rates and taxes. Come, you shall have a pint of beer all round. I am sure you want something to take the taste out."

As we went home, to have a good wash, and change our coats, I learned all the meaning of this strong measure, and felt no more pity for

the tenant evicted. He had occupied this cottage for some seven years now, and although he lived so close to us and on our land, scarcely any one had exchanged ten words with him. He was of a morose and silent nature, living all alone, though he had some money, and never going out of doors when he could help it. His name was Ben Harker, and throughout the village his nickname was "Old Arkerate;" for when anything was said to him that he could pick a hole in, if it were only a remark about the weather, he would always say—"No. That isn't arkerate." It was said that he had lost a considerable fortune, before he came to Sunbury, by some inaccuracy in a will, or title-deeds, and thence he had taken to challenge the correctness of even the most trivial statement. My Uncle had been longing for months to recover possession of his own premises; but old Harker took advantage of the obstacles richly provided by English law in such a case, and swore he would never go out without a law-suit. But he had never spent a halfpenny on repairs, though he had it so cheap through his promises; and by his own default he was thus smoked out, and the key was in the landlord's pocket.

Mrs. Selsey Bill, mother of seventeen living children, was very fat and stumpy—as behoves a giant's wife—and was blest with a cold in her head just now, which redeemed all her system from prejudice. The greatest philosophers assure us that all things—if there be anything—are good or bad, simply as we colour them in our own minds—that is to say, if we have minds—and to Mrs. Bill Tompkins the stench of that house was as sweet as the perfumes of Araby. She flung up the windows, from the force of habit, and not from "æsthetic preference," and she scrubbed away with soda, and fuller's earth, and soft soap, and bristle, and cocoa-fibre. And the next day, as soon as we had finished dinner (which we never left for nightfall, as if it were a burglary), my Uncle said, "Let us go and see how that place looks, after Old Arkerate has had to cut and run."

When we got there, fat little Mrs. Tompkins was scrubbing almost as hard as ever. It is quite wrong to talk as if fat people cannot work. Many of them can, and can even carry on, by drawing on their own resources, when a lean person having hollow places down her begins to pant, and has no stuff to fill them out. She drew her breath a little, as she got up from

the bucket; but neither of her hands went to her waist, because there was no such place to go to. She had three of the young ones strapped down on the floor of the room she had not yet grappled with; for her husband was of an ingenious mind, and necessity had taught him invention. Mrs. Selsey Bill stood up and faced us; she thought that we were come to say she had not done enough.

"Honourable gents," she began with the lead, as women love to do, "it don't look much; and you might think you got the worst of one and ninepence for a day, with the days going on for dusk at five o'clock. But when you has to find your own soap and flannels——"

"I think you have done wonders, Mrs. Tompkins;" my Uncle made answer with his pleasant smile. "If I only got the best of every bargain like this, I need never be out of elbows, Ma'am. Why, the stairs are as white as a scraped horse-radish. May we go up, and see the view from the best bedroom? Not if it will upset any of your clever doings. You are the mistress now; and we take your orders."

With a laugh, which challenged our criticism (for no man, except a sailor, knows the rudiments of scrubbing), she loosed for us a cord which

she had tied across, lest any Selsey baby might break bonds, and crawl upstairs; and presently we stood in a pretty little bedroom, with an ample but rickety window, facing southwards. The room was not too lofty, and I might have knocked my hat against the ceiling, if I had not doffed it. But Uncle Corny, being not so tall though wider, had plenty of head-room, and asked what man could want more. And when I looked out of the window, I agreed that a man deserved less, who could not be pleased with this.

For Honeysuckle Cottage stood at the very highest corner of all his pleasant fruit-grounds; and I was much surprised, having never been inside this house before, at the rich view of gardening ever varied, and of fair land and water beyond the fruit-alleys, which shone in the soft spread of sunshine far away. Over the heads of countless trees, and betwixt their coats of many colours, matched by the motherly hands of autumn, the broad reaches of the flooded Thames, with many a bend of sheen and shadow, led the eye to dwell with pleasure, and the heart with wonder. And across the wide water, sloping meadows, streaked and rounded with hedge and breastland, spread a green footing for the dark and distant hills.

"Let me see, to-day is Friday—an unlucky day, Kit, for you to come first to the house. If I had thought of that, we might have waited for to-morrow. But it can't be helped now; and I am not superstitious. On Monday I'll have Joe and Jimmy Andrews in, and put all these window-frames and doors to rights. Then we'll have Tilbury from Hampton, to see to the papering and painting, and all that. By the end of the week, we'll have it snug and tidy. I have sent all old Harker's traps after him to-day. They tell me he has taken that tumble-down barn of Osborne's, over by Halliford. I suppose I may whistle for my back-rents. I ought to have distrained upon his sticks; but I laughed so, when I saw how he bolted, that I could not do it. But you'll have to pay an improved rent, my lad. You can't have it under five shillings a week, and cheap enough at that, I can tell you."

"Why, what do you mean?" I asked. "I don't want a house; and if I did, how am I to keep it up? I haven't got a sixpence to call my own."

"Then a pretty fellow you are, to make up to Captain Fairthorn's daughter! Where did you intend to put her, I should like to know?

But we'll make that all right, between you and me and the bedpost. I have got a little nest-egg of your mother's money for you, and a heel-tap of your father's. Didn't you know why I smoked that old rogue out? Why, that this might be a little home for Kit and Kitty."

CHAPTER XX.

AUNT PARSLOW.

It is a bad thing for any man to be always beating his own bounds, and treading the track of his own grounds, and pursuing the twist of his own affairs—though they be even love-affairs—as a dog spins round to catch his own tail. Under the hammer of incessant thought, and in the hot pincers of perpetual yearning, I was getting as flat as a horseshoe twice removed, when Sam Henderson gave a boy twopence to slip into our grounds, when my Uncle's back was turned, and put into my hand an envelope addressed to "Samuel Henderson, Esquire, The Paddocks, Halliford, Middlesex." At first I thought, in my slow way, that his object was to let me see what deference he had won in racing circles; and I smiled at the littleness of the man. But the boy, who was shaking in his ventilated shoes, with dread of Uncle

Corny, said—" 'Tain't that side; turn 'un over." I obeyed his instructions, and beheld in pencil —" Come down the lane a bit. I have news for you, important."

What mortal, dwelling wholly on his own affairs, would not have concluded that this concerned him, on his own account, and unselfishly? I hurried on my coat, which had been thrown off for a job of winter pruning, and in less than two minutes I had turned the corner and was face to face with the mighty Sam.

" All right, old fellow," he said as coolly as if I had come to recover a loan. " You needn't turn a hair. It is not about your Kitty, but my skittish little Sally—Sally Chalker. You know I told you all about her, the daughter of the old bloke down at Ludred."

" Oh, I remember now," I answered, with a sudden chill of disappointment. " I might have known that it was not for me you were in such a precious hurry. You were very wise not to come into our place. My Uncle is a man of short measures."

" A man of uncommonly short measures. He will get fined some fine day, I'm afraid." Sam laughed wonderfully at his own wit. " But I know he don't want me to see his little tricks.

Don't bluster, beloved Kit; we all do it, and we respect one another all the more for it. Free trade has turned John Bull into Charley Fox. I can feel for you, my boy; for now there's a foreign rogue come poaching on my preserves at Ludred. And he doesn't know how many legs make a horse."

Sam tapped his own dapper and well-curved legs with a light gold-headed riding-whip, and his favourite mare, who was under the charge of a lad down the lane, gave a whinny to him. "There's nothing she don't know," said Sam; "and her name it is Sally."

I was not sure which of the two fillies—for I knew that he called his sweetheart one, and her name too was "Sally"—my friend was thus commending. But I rose to the situation, and said—"Let us go, and rout the fellow out."

"I was sure you would stand by a brother Briton," cried Sam, shaking hands very heartily; "and you won't find me forget it, Kit, when old Crumbly Pot comes back again. I am keeping a look-out for you there, as I gave you my word to do. It has been kettles to mend, I am told, in the fen-land where he hails from. I know a Jew fellow who brought

him to book, and was very nearly quodding him. He won't be back this side of Christmas, unless my friend is a liar, and then I shall do you as good a turn as you are going to do me now. Can you make it fit to come to-morrow? I'll put my Sally in the spider, and call for you about ten o'clock. You can tell old Punnets, that you want to see your Aunt Parslow about important business—for important it is and no mistake. Think of a dirty Frenchman nobbling sweet Sally Chalker, and all her cash!"

Old Punnets—as he insolently called my Uncle—was glad enough that I should pay a visit to my Aunt, or rather my mother's Aunt, Miss Parslow, who was said to be worth at least £10,000, as well as a very nice house, and large garden, and three or four meadows by the river Mole.

"You should never neglect such folk," he said; "you have no proper sense of the plainest duty. She has only one relation as near as you are, and he has got plenty of tin of his own. You might cut him out easy enough, if you tried, and now is the nick of time for it. Hannah Parslow is as proud as Punch, I know; and if you can only put it to her, with a little of the proper grease, of course, that your

mother's son is considered unfit to marry a young lady, because he cannot cut a shine,—who can tell what she might do for you? She doesn't spend half of her income, I know. I was thinking of it only the other night. And she might allow you two hundred a year, without stinting a pinch of Keating's powder. You love dogs, and dogs love you. Half the dogs in the village come to see you home. Make up to Jupiter, and Juno, and the other bow-wows she has taken to her bosom, and you'll never want my thirty shillings a week, nor yet the little balance of your father and mother's money. You go and see her, Kit. Don't lose a day. You may accept a lift from that fast Sam Henderson; but throw him over, as soon as you have got it."

Now, this little speech was as like as two peas to Uncle Corny's nature. He had never said a word about meaning to give me any one pound ten a week—though Heaven knows that I was worth it; for let the weather be what it would, there was I making the best of it. On the contrary, I had very seldom put into the purse (which I carried more for the husk than kernel) so much as five shillings on a Sunday morning, which was my Uncle's particular time

for easing his conscience about me. Of course I had my victuals, and my clothes to a certain extent, and the power to pay his bills (which made people offer me something sometimes); also I could talk as if the place belonged to me; but people knew better for at least three miles away. So that his talking of thirty shillings proved, without another word on his part, his high and holy views of marriage.

And again it was like him, to try to put me up to get something good out of good Aunt Parslow. Whatever I could get from her would mean so much relief for the Orchardson firm—as he often called us in his prouder times; though if I had asked for a penny of the proceeds, he would have banged his big desk upon my knuckles. But do not let me seem to say a word against him; for a better Uncle never lived; and I felt his generosity very deeply, until I began to think of it.

Few things have been more successful yet, and very few have been better managed, than that drive of ours to Leatherhead. Possibly Sam was a luckier fellow than myself; and I think it likely, because he was less deserving. Not that there was much harm about him, except a kind of laxity in talk, and a strained

desire to be accounted sharp, and a strong ambition to rise in the world, without cleaning the steps ere he mounted them. But he showed a fine heart by his words just now—although he was much ashamed of it—and the pace we were going at brought it out, for a brisk air stirs up the best part of us.

"Ain't she a stepper?" he said, as we crossed Walton bridge, and dashed through the flood-water, for the high-road was not made up then; "wet or dry is all alike to Sally. That's the way to go through the world, my boy. Julius Cæsar crossed the river here; and I have got a yearling named after him. What makes it all the kinder on my part is that he hasn't got Latin in his family. How proud the old chap would have been for me to go out of the custom so! It will set a whole lot of the Emperors going, if the colt cuts the shine I expect of him."

Knowing nothing about the turf, and caring very little, I let him rattle on about pedigrees, and strains of double blood, and Waxy, and Whalebone, and I know not what, as bad as the Multiplication table; and I wondered that such stuff should form his discourse, when he should have been full of young ladies. Even

the beauty of the country, which was more than enough to delight the eyes and hold the mind still with pleasure, seemed nothing to Sam beyond—"Yes, very pretty. Nice bit of training-ground up there. That's the sort of grass that suits milk-teeth."

At last, as we came within a mile of our mark, and followed the fair valley of the river, I brought him to the business of the day, having heard enough of Spider-wheels, and flyers, and so forth; and requiring to know what he expected of me. We had gone at such a pace, up hill and down, scarcely ever varying from one long stride, which left every other "trap" far in the lurch, that but for my boyish remembrance of the place, I could scarcely have believed that we were almost in the village.

"Fifteen or five," he said, "that's her pace; there's no halfway house for Sally. She walks a good five. Walk is the word, old gal. Well, all you have got to do, Kit, is just this. I put up at the 'Dolphin,' and you make a call, with your best gloves on, and your hat brushed up, at Valley-view House, where your good Aunt lives. You have not seen her for years. So much the better. Tell her that a distinguished

friend of yours, especially esteemed by your Uncle, and well known in the best London circles, has important business in the town; and that you took occasion to pay your respects, where they have been due so long. Admire her dogs, and all that sort of thing; and when she insists on your staying to lunch, regret very deeply that you cannot leave your distinguished friend, etc. Then if she is any good, she will say—'Do you think he would waive formality?' and so on. And you say—'If he is not engaged at Lord Nethersole's, I will endeavour to fetch him.' I shall happen to be lounging up the hill, and shall pull out my watch and be doubtful. But the attractions of the spot are too many for me. I throw over his lordship, and get over the old lady."

I promised to do my best towards this, but without any fictions concerning him; for his best chance lay, as I told him, in moderation and simplicity. For my Aunt, according to my remembrance, was rather a shrewd old lady; and Sam had shown some little sense of this, in the choice of what he called his toggery. All rich adornments, and gorgeous hues, had been for once discarded; his clothes were all of a quiet gray, and his tone had

subsided from the solar to the lunar rainbow. In short, he looked more like a gentleman, than I had ever known him look before; and seeing what a fine young man he was, I felt heartily glad that he had fixed his affections where they could not imperil mine.

When I entered the gate of Valley-view, nine or ten small dogs came scampering out, all giving tongue, and all making believe to be born for one end, namely my end. There were pugs, and Skye-terriers, and Blenheim-spaniels, and wiry-coated terriers, and Italian greyhounds, and little ridiculous toy-dogs fit for a child's Noah's ark; and I know not what else, but no dog of the name of "Silence." "What a pack of curs!" I said rather gruffly, and with a gesture of contempt, for I never did hear such a medley of barks. As dogs are the most humorous creatures in the world, they immediately looked at one another and laughed, each applying my remark to his neighbours. If they had been curs, they would have felt it more; being all of fine breeding they took it lightly, as I said it, for I had no real meaning to offend them. Then, a great deal more quickly than we settle matters, they referred the whole question to a grand old pug, with

his face pulled up short, like a plaited blind, by the cords of disgust at the tricks of mankind, and lots of little pimples, like a turbot's moles, upon it. As chairman of committee he came up to me, reserving his stump in a very strict line, till my character passed through the test of his nose. Then he gave a little doubtful trepidation to his tail, and after another sniff, a very hearty wag; and with one accord all the doggies set off to the house, to announce that an honest dog was coming.

Miss Parslow was inclined, as appeared thereafter, to attach much importance to the verdict of her dogs, even as a Roman Admiral should have consulted his holy chickens. When the dogs came to say that they believed me to be safe, their mistress put them all into their own room, and came out to the porch to meet me. She knew me at once, though I might have forgotten her, except for a great event in my life, when she gave me the first sovereign I ever possessed. Being a small and slim lady, she rested her head upon the upper pocket of my waistcoat, which seemed to be an excellent omen.

"Oh, how you do take after your dear mother!" she exclaimed, with a genial tear

or two; "you are not like an Orchardson, my dear boy; but a Parslow, a Parslow all over! Why have you kept away from Valley-view till now?"

This was a difficult question to answer; and therefore I naturally asked another. "How are you getting on, my dear Aunt? And will it put you out, that I should come like this? I wrote last night; but it may have been too late."

"Oh, the posts are always wrong. Come and sit here by the fire. We shall have a sharp winter; I am sure of that. *Jupiter* knows the weather as well as if he made it. Now come and tell me all about your own affairs."

At first I was not at all inclined to that, preferring to talk about hers, and desiring some knowledge of her character and opinions, before I began to spread forth my own. But she took the lead of me, and contrived to get out of me all about Uncle Corny, and everybody else I had to do with, and even the whole of my hopes and fears concerning the main object of my life. For the old can always pump the young, when they know the right way to oil the handle.

"I cannot see where the presumption is," she said as she took my hand, and placed it in one

of hers and patted it; "your mother was Annie Parslow, as sweet a young lady as any Miss Fairthorn. Her father would have been Lord Mayor of London, if he had only lived long enough. The Parslows were in the tea line, which is equal to almost any. It is true that she dropped several grades in life, by marrying George Orchardson——"

"And Miss Fairthorn's friends, if she ever does it, will say that she dropped several grades in life by marrying Kit Orchardson." I felt that I had her there; but she would not see it.

"Don't talk nonsense, Kit. The case is wholly different. You may be counted as half a Parslow, while nobody knows what she is. And you must not consider what her friends will say, but your own, who are sensible people. You have acted very wisely in coming over to tell me all about this affair. I am sorry that the girl is so poor, through her father's stupid carelessness. You know that I like your Uncle Cornelius, although he is such a queer character. One of the most obstinate men on earth, and nearly all men are obstinate. But he is apt to put things off. He is always waiting for something else to be ready. I shall pay him a visit, as soon as Mr. Parker's fly has got its new

cushions in, and his bay horse recovered from his lameness. Then we will settle something about you. I never let the grass grow below my feet. I shall make your Uncle Corny come to book. I am quite convinced in my own mind, that he has been keeping all these years a nice little lump of your father's money, as well as your dear mother's property. No Parslow was ever a beggar yet. There was none of them but had a silver teapot, as was only decent in the business. And most of them could fill it with bank-notes, though I'm not saying that your mother could. Dear me, what a dreadful to-do there was, when she ran away with George Orchardson! My dear brother vowed he would never forgive her, although she was his favourite child; so upright, and fair, and so ladylike, and cheeks like damask roses! You never see such a sweet face now. All their education is to learn to stare; and all their polish is like a brass knocker's. What they all want is a good stepmother, to starve and to slap their airs out of them. That may have made your Kitty nicer than you can expect to find them now. If I were a young man, I wouldn't marry any girl who had not been ten years under a strong stepmother.

Why, how many more times is that young man to lounge up and down the road over there? He is very like the one who comes from somewhere near you, and has taken a fancy to Sally Chalker."

"My dear Aunt," I said, "your delightful conversation has driven him out of my head altogether. It must be Mr. Henderson, who drove me over, a sporting man, but a landowner, and a very fashionable fellow. He is waiting for me to go back with him, no doubt, and he will not take the liberty of ringing your bell. I must not keep him any more. Goodbye, dear Aunt."

"Do you think that I would let you go without a morsel? We shall have luncheon in about five minutes. Ask your friend to join us, if he will oblige me. Oh, I do like a shy man, he is getting so scarce!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A TULIP BLOOM.

All Leatherheadians used to admit, and could show good reason for doing so, that my great-aunt Parslow was the cleverest woman, as well as the most respectable in the place. But even her abilities were hardly taxed to find in my friend Sam Henderson any large amount of that element of shyness, with which she had endowed him through the window. His merits were rather inclined to dispense with any bridal veil of modesty, and his charms never mantled themselves in moss, as the coy rose attracts by retiring. But I was pleased to find that he behaved much better, than any of his best friends could have hoped; for he dropped all slang, and soared into lofty places among much more nobility than I had ever heard of. And I wondered a little at my Aunt's familiarity with all the great names he was so friendly

with; for she never said "No," but nodded intimately, whenever he presumed that she knew the Earl of something, or even the Duke of anything. I could not resist the conclusion that the Parslows had been in the peerage, and lost it; probably through excess of greatness, and consequent peril to the Throne itself.

When Sam had told scandals enough of great people, to keep all Ludred in a ferment for a month—though I noticed with surprise his delicacy and deference to the fact (if to no other) that he was speaking in the presence of a maiden lady—he played another card, even more effective; he asked, as the very greatest favour he could think of, the honour of an introduction to the noblest circle of dogs now existing in the kingdom.

"Perhaps you will regret it, Mr. Henderson," Aunt Parslow replied, with a smile and a blush, for she had a very pretty colour still, which had varied with some of his narratives. "My dogs are perfect little wizards and witches. They took to my nephew, because he is a Parslow, and perhaps because he is so innocent. But you have seen so much of the world——"

"Yet kept myself quite untainted by it." He spoke with such gravity that I was obliged

to turn away. "Next to the society of accomplished ladies, I enjoy that of horses, and of thorough-bred dogs. With a very long interval between, of course. But I scarcely ever meet an accomplished lady. What a lucky mark I must put to this day! Oh, if I could only show you my little Tim! He can stand on his tail, and sing 'Rule Britannia,' and beat time with all his four legs in the air. But compared to your dogs he is nothing but a cur! What beauties! Why, Miss Parslow, I will never trust my eyes again."

"Yes, they are very pretty, and as good as any children, or a great deal better, I might say. *Jupiter*, don't growl, sir. *Cleopatra*, take your teeth out of Mr. Henderson's boot. *Vulcan*, and *Venus*, and *Mercury*—oh dear!"

At a signal from *Jupiter*, the ancient pug, all the pets had made a rush at the bewildered Sam, and a chorus of yells arose as he was obliged, in self-defence, to kick at them. Then they rallied in a body round the corner of the side-board, snarling and showing their little white teeth, with their bristles erect and their eyes full of fire, bravely encouraging one another for a still fiercer charge at the stranger. And he would have had the worst of it, or killed some

of the tiny ones, if I had not spied a light whip in the lobby, and given Master *Jupiter* a crack on his fat sides, which made him bolt with a howl, and all his army followed suit.

"Oh, how shall I punish them? Do forgive me. I never knew them do such a thing before. And I thought them such excellent judges of character! How could I imagine that they would ever fly at you? And they have pulled down the cloth, and broken two decanters that belonged to my dear mother. But that is nothing, Mr. Henderson, compared with the shocking fright they have given you. How can I ever thank you for not killing them?"

Then Henderson, with the skill of Hannibal, turned his defeat into victory. "What plucky little chaps they are!" he said; "I did all I could to put them in a rage, on purpose to test their breeding. Perhaps you saw me flash this pin at them. If anything drives a small dog wild, it is to catch him in the eyes with a large carbuncle. But I got the worst of it, and serve me right. I only hope I may not have hurt any of the darlings."

"You are magnanimity itself, my dear sir;" Aunt Parslow glanced shyly at his very good trousers, which would never be quite so good

again; "the main point is whether you are hurt. Even a very little dog, you know——."

"Miss Parslow, a dog, unless really rabid, is not a quarter so venomous as a cat. If I had been attacked like that by cats, I could not have dared to show a bit of mercy, even if they had been prime favourites of yours."

"Oh, I cannot bear cats. I am so glad you draw that most just distinction. Dogs are so noble and generous, so candid, and loving, and chivalrous. They showed that, even when they did their best to bite you. But a cat is so stealthy, and crawling, and crafty, and I might even say bloodthirsty. Next to my dogs, I love my birds, the dear little things that come and sing, even in the—not by any means an elegant expression—of winter. Not a robin could live here, until I had my doggies. But that sounds like the front-door bell! Kit, would you oblige me by just seeing who it is? Jenny and Biddy are engaged, I know. What a very strange thing, if it should be Miss Chalker! Of course, you never heard of our belle Chalker, Mr. Henderson."

"Madam, it appears to me that you are all belles here." Sam bowed as he spoke, and contrived to convey me a wink as I left the

room, which told me that the very strange thing had been brought to pass by post, or possibly by telegram.

When I opened the door, I saw a very pretty girl, but no more to be compared with my darling Kitty, than a tulip with a lily of the valley. Although it was close upon winter now, she had a striped parasol, which I detest; and her velvet hat (turned down over one ear, and turned up at the other) had two king-fishers' wings stuck crosswise, and between them a gorgeous topaz humming-bird. You might look at my Kitty fifty times; and if any one asked you how she was dressed, you would have to say, "I have not the least idea," if you happened not to be a woman. But this young lady's attire compelled attention, and perhaps deserved it.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said very nicely, and giving me a smile which made two dimples; "but I thought that Miss Parslow might be disengaged. I thought I would look in, as I was going down the town. But I will not intrude, if she has visitors."

She made some difficulty about coming in, as if she were not bent upon doing so; but I told her, with a look, which she feigned not to

understand, that I should never be forgiven if I allowed her to depart. Then the lady of the house came out, and brought her in, and introduced her to both visitors. "Oh, I know Mr. Henderson, a great friend of my father's; I am so glad that he knows you, Aunt Parslow. I am sure he admires your lovely view."

Now, this was not exactly to my liking. What right had she to call my Aunt Parslow hers? If I ever met any one free from petty jealousy, I believe it is the one I see while shaving. But ever since Sam Henderson came in at my Aunt's door, I, who had been getting on so well till then, seemed to be no better than a nobody. He had made himself the hero of the hour, and played first fiddle, and forced his way into her best graces, by working on her vanity, and social yearnings, and family pride, till I quite expected that he would declare himself to be a Parslow, and entitled to the silver teapot. And now here was this girl, who had made up her mind, as I could see plainly, to be Mrs. Sam ere long, daring to address my wealthy relative as her own Aunt Parslow!

"Kit, you don't look very well," said the lady of the house, after much chatter had been indulged in; "a little change will do you good

perhaps. I suppose you are always up an apple-tree at home. Would you like to come with me through my long garden, and give me your advice about one or two things? The view up the valley is very lovely, and so perfectly rustic. Jenny will have tea ready, when we come back."

To this we all agreed with great pleasure, and my Aunt contrived to let Sam and his Sally fall behind, quite out of our sight among the trees and shrubs, while she took my arm, and let me carry her camp-stool. *Jupiter* alone of the dogs came with us, for she scarcely went even to church without him; and he certainly was a clever and amusing fellow, full of information, and yet always adding to it. He looked at me with great respect, and not a shadow of resentment for the very solid whack I had bestowed upon him. His black muzzle, big forehead, large deep eyes, crow's feet of experience, and furrows of philosophy, were relieved of their austerity, every now and then, by the gentle waggery of his corkscrew tail.

"Now I will show you as lovely a piece of rich English landscape as ever you saw;" the old lady said, as we turned a grassy corner. "I have often thought of having a bower made

here; but perhaps that would tend to Cockneyfy it. Let me have the stool, Kit, and you sit on that stump. The view from the house is very beautiful, but this beats it, because it shows another bend, and perhaps the very prettiest bend of all the valley. You ought to be here in May, Kit, when the lilacs and laburnums, and the wild-broom, and the apple-blossom, and the soft green of the trees along the winding river—don't talk to me of Devonshire after that. I have never been there; but I won't believe it."

I admired the view, which was very nice indeed, and very prettily varied in its way. At the same time, I could not help thinking that some of the broad reaches of the Thames, and the long spread of meadows with the slanting sun, and the cattle too sleek to care a flip for flies, and the trees, and the islands, and the glassy quiet—such as we have round our way—were much more likely to do a man good (which must be the thing they were made for) than all the sharp turns of a pretty little stream which our river receives without knowing it.

"You are right, my dear nephew," replied my dear Aunt, when I had expressed opinions not exactly as above; "it is indeed a large and

noble sight. But I fear that those two young people behind us will be looking all the time at one another, and perhaps never know that they are in a valley. Mr. Henderson is a very pleasant young man, so far as I can judge, and a clever one, likely to make his own way in the world, with the help of all the very great friends he has. But is he to be thoroughly depended on? Has he the strict principle, and downright honesty, and love of domestic life, without which no marriage can be truly happy? I have a great regard for young Miss Chalker; and though her father belongs to another grade of life, and one with which I have but little sympathy, I believe him to be a very upright man, and his heart is bound up with his only child. She has no mother, you must understand; and I will not lend myself to anything, for which I could not answer to her father and myself."

My Aunt fixed her keen gray eyes upon me, and her white hair added to their force and truth. For the first time, I felt that I had acted rashly, and by no means rightly in the matter, as she put it. And that she put it sensibly, and honestly, and kindly, was too evident for my self-content. I should not have yielded to Sam's

overtures, or at any rate, I should not have involved her in the case, without being far more sure than I was at present of his good qualities. I answered as truthfully as I could, which is the only right thing to do, however it may end. And I felt that the end might be my disgrace with her.

"Aunt Parslow, I know very little of Sam Henderson. That is to say, I have known him from a boy, but never been intimate with him. In our village he is considered rather 'fast.' But we are a very steady-going lot; and any one, who deals at all with racing matters, is sure to get that reputation with us. I have never heard anything against his honesty; if I had, I should not be with him, until it was disproved. I think that he is really attached to Miss Chalker; but whether he would be a good husband for her, is a great deal more than I can say. You ladies are the best judges of such matters. If you can give him a good word, do. But it must depend entirely on your own judgment. For as I said before, I do not know him at all thoroughly."

"I am not very sanguine about it," said my Aunt, whose eyes had never left mine, while I spoke; "and I shall take good care that, if they

meet again here, it shall be with her father's knowledge. There is one thing to be said, that they both belong to the same class in life, and are likely therefore to understand one another's ways. The same cannot be said of you, my dear; and your love is a much more romantic affair, and likely, I fear, to run no smooth course. There I will help you all I can, and my advice will be of great service to you. Also if you want a little money, you know where to come for it. And that reminds me that you may want some now. Your Uncle Orchardson is a man, I believe, of great integrity and fine principle; but I know that he objects very strongly to parting with any of the means God has given him. If you are obliged to run away with your Kitty, to save her from an old reprobate,—and it may come to that, though I dislike such things—what does your Uncle propose to do for you? He ought to do something handsome."

"And so he will, something very handsome. He has promised to pay me thirty shillings a week, for my services in his business, and to let us a cottage at five shillings a week, which must be worth seven and sixpence."

"Exactly like him, the old curmudgeon!

Well, I won't say yet what I will do, because I have not even seen your Kitty, and I have of course so many claims upon me. But here is a ten-pound note, to save you from making your Uncle unhappy by asking him to advance you a trifle; and if you want another you can have it any day. I am pleased with you, Christopher, because I think you have told me the truth about all these affairs, as well as about Mr. Henderson; and *Jupiter*, who is the greatest of all judges, has pronounced most strongly in your favour. Now let us go and look for that sporting pair. Quite enough of such proceedings in my garden."

CHAPTER XXII.

COLDPEPPER HALL.

Although there was a little help of moonlight, Sam drove home very carefully; for the more a man has to do with horses, the better he knows where the risk is. And I saw that his speech about Sally's speed, as a power that could not be modified, was a speech, and nothing more. He set me down at my Uncle's door, with many warm thanks for my kindness, and a strong assurance that he should now go in and win. But my Uncle was not so well pleased; for he had very little love for Sam, and much hatred at being kept out of his bed.

"I suppose you don't want any supper," he grumbled; "if you do, you must go and get what you can find. Your Aunt Parslow is a wealthy woman, but not the one to feed you as I do. I'll be bound she has sent you quite empty away. There's a bit of cold hock of bacon in the cupboard."

I told him that I had been fed like a Prince, which only increased his ill humour. "She wants you to go and do her trees for nothing. I understand that old woman;" he said, as he gave me an inch of tallow candle. "But after real turtle and Champagne, you will be able to make something out of this. It came by the girl, who is old Tabby's niece, or cousin, or grandmother, or something. The footman, no doubt, was too grand to come down here. Don't bother me with it. I want my nightcap."

He gave me a letter, which he had opened, and which was addressed in a crabbed hand to "Mr. Cornelius Orchardson, Market-Gardener, Sunbury;" and when he was gone, I read as follows:—

"Miss Coldpepper presents her compliments to Mr. Orchardson, and will be much obliged if he will send his nephew Christopher to the Hall at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, as Miss Coldpepper has something to say to him."

My conscience being in a dreadful state of nervousness and discomfort, without anybody to relieve it to, or any one to put it on, I wondered and wondered what this could mean; till my dreams, like a thatcher's bole, twisted it into a thousand ropes of many-coloured stuff

and stream. And when the morning came at last, I could not set about my work, until I had learned what Tabby Tapscott thought about this new surprise. She, in her provoking ways, pretended to know everything, but would only shake her head, and mutter, and tell me to insure my life. At last I saw that she knew nothing, and the only comfort that I could find was to tell her that she should never know, because she was an old humbug.

It was a dull and foggy morning, with a gray rime on the grass, and dead leaves hanging tipped with wet, and dribbles of puddles along the walk doubting whether to freeze or flow, and the whole air reeking with that Job's comfort, which means that there is much worse to come. I buttoned my coat, and strode more briskly, though going upon a loth errand, you may know.

When they showed me in at the tradesman's door—for I then looked up to dignities, which exist by being looked up to—a strange and unaccustomed thing upset all the rally of my conscience. *Regulus*, the foremost of all beings in a well-regulated household, came down the passage, at a pace which spoke nine volumes for his digestion, though his lips were clouted

with fine cream; and instead of taking a nip at me, he threw up his head, as if he would have taken his hat off, if he wore one, and indulged in a bark of welcome, which went ringing back to the hall itself. Then he cut a caper round my feet, and with the innumerable laughter of his tail, fell fawning, and begged but a word from me. I have often seen men of small self-respect do that sort of thing to great personages, but I knew that this dog was full of self-respect, and had little for other people. What was passing in his mind I cannot say, but simply record his actions.

"Well, I never see the like!" said Charles, who had condescended to let me in. "Why, he snap'th worse than ever at me; though the Lord knows how I sweated to get 'un back. But come along this way, Master Kit; my lady will see you in the Justice-room."

He showed me into a square panelled chamber, where old Squire Nicholas used to rule over poachers and little thieves brought before him by the parish constable; and with *Regulus* still at my heels, I stood waiting anxiously for the lady.

At length there came a rustle of silk moving slowly, watered silk, such as we seldom see

now, and can scarcely find time to think of. And as fine as the silk, and as able to stand alone, was the lady inside it. Although she lived so near to us, and drove by in her carriage so often, I knew her rather by sight than speech, and better by report than either. She was tall, and straight, and of goodly presence, with fine large features, and a steadfast look, which expressed clear perception and strong resolve, but less violence of nature than her sister showed. Her abundant hair, drawn back from her ample forehead and coiled at the back of her head, would have been jet black, but for a few lines of silver and an undercast of a tint like that of an American oak-leaf. To me she appeared more imposing and handsome than her sister Monica; but I may have thought more highly of her because she lived at Sunbury. This lady made me a graceful bow, a very slight one, but still it was a bow, and proved that her nature was better than that of the Honourable Mrs. Bulwrag. I replied with a low bend and scrape of my foot, which I always understand to be the proper thing, in such a case. And the guilt of my heart, as I thought of her dog, was enough to account for the deep blush I felt.

"Are you the young Mr. Orchardson," she asked, "the nephew of that Mr. Orchardson who owns the large garden and long walls at Sunbury? Then I have a little matter to discuss with you. But how strongly my dog seems to take to you! It is not at all his general character. He is not at all devoted to mankind. But he has a remarkable memory. Perhaps you were kind to him, when he was quite young. Or perhaps you were even his master?"

"No, Ma'am; I know him only as your dog. But most dogs are fond of me. An aunt of mine has nine, and I was with them yesterday."

"Oh, that explains it;" she spoke with a smile which made her face quite beautiful, and I wondered at the taste of the Honourable Tom in exchanging her for her sister. "Now I dare say you know why I sent for you. For some years I have not seen very much of my sister, now the wife of Professor Fairthorn, a man well known in the scientific world. But a few weeks ago Captain Fairthorn asked me to allow his daughter by a previous marriage to spend a few days with me here; and I consented, for I knew him long before he married my sister, and have always felt a great regard for

him. There is no reason why I should enter into that. Miss Fairthorn was here for about ten days, and she might have been longer but for you. Who are you, that you should dare to fall in love with her?"

Now these words look very harsh as written, and would sound so too, if harshly spoken. But Miss Coldpepper scarcely seemed to mean them thus; for there was no contempt in her voice, and I thought that her glance was kind, though her face was very grave. Perhaps she was thinking of her own love-time; which would rouse at once pity for me, and ill-will towards the sister, who then had wronged her so.

It was difficult for me to answer her, and I was in no hurry to do so; knowing from dialogues with Tabby Tapscott, that women are ready to go on again, and perhaps answer themselves, when provoked to do it. Not that I compared Miss Coldpepper with our poor Tabby for a moment; only that much the same rule applies to all women, when they grow unruly. Their main object is to say something striking, being forbidden by nature to strike otherwise.

"You have nothing to say then," continued the lady, without giving me time to know how much I had; "very well, I think that it is better

so. I have tried to make every allowance for you, and I am glad not to find you at all defiant. Miss Fairthorn, of course, has no particular claims of birth to stand upon; for you know, and perhaps you have thought about that, that she has none of the Coldpepper blood in her system. I suppose, if she had, you would scarcely have dared to behave in this way, Mr. Orchardson?"

"Certainly not, madam." I replied with genuine truth, for I must have been frightened at the fearful temper of the family. And if Kitty had been a Coldpepper, she could not have owned the sweet face which had won me.

"Really, I do not perceive in you," her ladyship (as our people called her) went on in a gentler tone, "any signs of that audacity with which my sister charges you. To me you seem to be a well-meaning and fairly educated young man. And it may be your misfortune, more than fault, that you have given this offence. You certainly were of the greatest service to my niece—as I allow her to call herself, although she is no niece of mine—when that excessively stupid Marker led her into needless danger. I do not know what I could have said to Professor Fairthorn, if his daughter had been

swept away, through the folly of my housekeeper. And more than that, I was beginning to grow rather fond of that young girl. I found her so ready, and clever, and obliging, and free from the conceit the young people show now. When she was taken away like that, I missed her very sadly, and felt for her deeply at having to go back to—to so very dull a house. But I wish you to understand, young man, that though I am not in a position to forbid, I cannot in any way sanction, or even approve your suit to her. And I trust that your own common sense will induce you to withdraw it, and try to forget her. You may think it hard. But it must be so. Will you promise to think no more of her?"

"No, I cannot do that;" I answered in a low voice, which grew stronger, as my heart warmed with my words. "I will tell you no falsehood, Miss Coldpepper. As long as I live, I must think of her, and no one else in all this world. She is more to me than my life, my soul, or even my hope of another life. From the moment I first set eyes upon her, there was nothing else worth living for. The Lord, who governs all our ways, and knows what is the best for us, has been pleased to give me her

pure love, a greater gift than the life He gave; and with His aid I will hold it fast; and He alone shall ever part us. I am not accustomed to strong words, but these are weak, to what my meaning is."

"Well, I think they are pretty strong; but I will not blame you for them." She turned from my eyes, which were bright with deep passion, as behoved a well-bred lady. "When things have come to such a pass, there is little more to be said or done. Only it occurs to me, who have seen a good deal of men and women, that these brave words are often said, and for the moment felt, no doubt; but in a few years, or even one, or perhaps a month—where are they? A new love, equally the gift of Heaven, comes in with still hotter fervour; and the old one is whistled down the wind. And why should it not be so with you?" I knew that in the heat of the moment, she was referring to her own case; and my place was to be silent.

"Christopher Orchardson," she said at last, recovering her business tone, "I have delivered my message to you, and it has not made much impression. To me the matter is of little moment, except that I like Miss Fairthorn more than I ever expected to like a girl again. And

I am not pleased, as you may suppose, that she, with her youth, and abilities, and beauty, should make so poor a marriage. Have you thought of this? Have you considered whether you have any right to take her from a rank in life, or at least from a social position above your own, and keep her in a cottage, among working-men, with a scanty and perhaps doubtful income? You are a man of spirit; do you think this fair?"

This was the point of all points, which perplexed me more than I could settle. She saw how deeply her words had moved me, and waited with a grim smile for my reply.

"Yes, I have fully considered that; and it is the one matter I doubt about. You have put it more clearly, madam, than I could put it, and entirely without exaggeration. And I scarcely know how to answer, without referring to things that may pain you. But you may be aware that Miss Fairthorn at present leads a most unhappy life. And even worse than that, everything is being done to force her into a miserable marriage with a man of more than twice her age, and of anything but good character. He is supposed to be rich, but is poorer than myself, because he owes more than he can pay.

She had better go to her grave, than become the wife of such a person. From this she has no escape except the quiet home I can give her. And to live among working-men, who would respect, and look up to, and admire her, is surely less of a degradation than to be brought into wild and rough company, as in the other case she must be. It will be known here, that she has had the honour of your acquaintance and liking; and though you may not think fit to continue it, under the change of circumstances, people will value her by what has been. And as for being happy, what is there to prevent it? She will live in a beautiful place and fine gardens, where there is always plenty to look at, and enjoy, according to the time of year, abundance of flowers, and fruit, and good living, my Uncle to make much of her, and myself to worship her, and nobody ever to say a cross word."

"It is not surprising that you have won her consent," Miss Coldpepper answered gravely, "if you have put your proposals thus. How could a poor London girl resist such a programme? And Kitty loves the country, as a lark or a wood-queist does. Well, you must understand that I will have nothing more to

say about it. I have been asked to tell you what I think. I have done so; and there is an end of it."

With these words, she rang the bell, for some one to show me the way out; but having found her much less awful than I had expected, I was not content to let well alone, but must needs try to get further.

"Madam," I said, "you have listened so kindly to all I have ventured to tell you, that I hope you will let me ask one question, without being thought impertinent. It is only that I should like to know, who it is that has begged you to speak to me, and whether Captain Fairthorn is aware of it."

At once her demeanour was changed to me, and her lofty indifference was gone. Her eyebrows rose, and her eyelids quivered, and her face flushed with wrath, like a storm-cloud with the sun.

"I think that I have listened too kindly to you, and the things you have dared to tell me. It will teach me to have less to say to underbred young men henceforth. Charles, show this young man where the front door is."

This was very clever, and abashed me deeply; as if I had no right to know any other than

the back-entrance. And I observed that she did not lose her self-command, nor revile me as if on her own level, as her far less dignified sister did. I was much more entirely smitten down, and made sensible of my distance from her, as one too deep to be bridged by words. And yet the sense of justice, which is always strongest in the young, stood up and bade me take all this as only of human ordinance. For no thought of presumption had been in my mind, or of undue familiarity. A cat may look at a King; and the King (like a dog) hath only his own day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT BAY, AND IN THE BAY.

Every one, who can call to mind that year of bad weather, 1860, will bear me out in saying that it showed no weakness, no lack of consistency to the last. Rain and chill were the rule of the summer, snow and severe cold the order of the winter. In the beginning of December, the earth was sodden, and the rivers thick with flood. Then the sky was amassed with fog, and the trees hung low with trembling drip, and even the humble weeds and grass were bearded with a glaucous reek, not crisp nor bright as of rime or frost, but limp, and dull, and bleary. Having never seen such a thing till now, I could not tell what to make of it; but Uncle Corny, who had been compelled for years to watch the weather, said—"Up with all the winter apples, and the Glou Morceau, and Beurré Rance, up with them all to Covent

Garden, or we shall have them frozen on the shelves. Or even if we can keep the frost out, we shall have the van snowed up. Things looked just as they do now, in December, 1837, only the ground was not so wet. Go down to the barges, and order in ten tons of coal, we shall want it all, and twenty chaldrons of gas-coke. The frost will last till February, and fuel will cost a rare price then."

I was inclined to laugh at this as a bold and rash prediction; but it was more than verified by the weather that set in upon the eighteenth of December, not with any sudden change, but the cold growing more decided. By this time Honeysuckle Cottage was thoroughly cleansed, and in good trim, painted, and papered, and neatly furnished, with Tabby put in to keep it warm, but only permitted to use one room. And I used to go there every day, and sit in the little parlour, reading the only letter I had yet received from one who was more to me than words. It was written in a small clear hand, and dated on the very day after my visit to her, and the purport of it was to comfort me and persuade me to wait with all endurance, until I should have leave to come again. And long as the time had seemed, and dreary, and

empty of all except distant hope, I had done my best to get through it, with the courage of a man, and the faith of love.

"It is for my dear father's sake," she wrote, "that I am compelled to ask you this. There has been a fearful scene which even his sweet endurance and wonderful temper could scarcely carry him through, without sad injury to his health and work. His heart is not very strong, and though he tries to laugh these troubles off, or despise them as below his notice, to me it is plain that they worry and wear him, a great deal more than he deigns to show. And I know that he bitterly reproaches himself, although he so rarely speaks of it, for having been so deluded as to place nearly all his property in the power of those who should only have a part. When he looks at me and sighs, I know exactly what he is thinking of; and it is my place to save him from all that can be avoided of strife and ill treatment. A more placid and peaceful man never lived, yet comfort and peace are denied him. In a few weeks he will leave home again—if this house can be called a home—and then I should like to see you, dear, with his permission before he goes; because I am not afraid for myself, and I may have to settle

what is to be done, if a certain gentleman should come back, and try to force his visits upon me, while my father is away. If this should happen, you shall hear at once, unless I am locked up, as I used to be sometimes. Do not write; she takes every letter; and it would only cause more misery. We must trust in Heaven, and in one another; for I know that you love me, as I love you."

This very faithful and sensible letter was beginning to grow threadbare now, or rather was returning to its original state of thread, with my constant handling. And it left me in a sore predicament, which became sorer, as time went on, and no other tidings reached me. It was grievous to reflect, that with better policy, and judicious flattery, I might perhaps have contrived to get a scrap or two of information even from the stately lady of the Hall, or at any rate through Mrs. Marker. But that good housekeeper shunned me now, probably under strict orders; or if ever I managed to bring her to bay, she declared that she knew nothing; and perhaps this was true, for the choleric sisters held little communication. As a last resource, I got Mrs. Tapscott to promise her niece the most amiable tips for every bit of

tidings she could bring; but nothing came of that, and by this time verily my condition of mind was feverish. In vain I consulted that oracle of the neighbourhood—Uncle Corny; for an oracle he was now become, partly through making good figures of his fruit, partly through holding tongue and shaking head, and partly no doubt by defeating the lawyers, and smoking out "Old Arkerate." But all I could win from this oracle was—"Go up, and get in at the window."

I was ready to get in at any window—big enough for my head to pass—if only I could have found Kitty inside, and quick to forgive me for coming. But to talk is all very fine, and old men make it do for everything; to act is the province of the young, who have not found out how vain it is.

Being touched up therefore on every side—for even old Tabby made sniffs at me, and Selsey Bill winked, in a manner that meant—"Would there ever have been seventeen young Selseys, if I had hung fire as you do?"—and my Uncle said quietly, between two puffs—"In for a penny in for a pound; that used to be the way when I was young"—being stirred up more deeply by my own heart, which was sadly

unquiet within me, I set off at last, without a word, and not even a horse to help me.

The frost had set in, that mighty frost which froze the Thames down to Kingston Bridge, and would have frozen it to London Bridge, except for one pause at the end of the year, and the rush of so much land-water. The ground was already as hard as iron, but no snow had fallen, to smother it up. The walking was good, and the legs kept going, to keep one another and the whole affair alive. There must have been a deal of ground soon overcome between them; for they were not out of Uncle Corny's gate till Sunbury clock struck three, and they knocked against the gate of Bulwrag Park, when the twilight still hung in the sky. And this had been done against a bitter east wind, with a low scud of snow flying into the teeth, and scurfing the darkening road with gray.

Here it was needful to reflect a little; for to think against the drift of air is worthless, for anything weaker than a six-wheeled engine. I found a little shelter from the old Scotch firs, and halted in their darkness, and considered what to do. The house, about a hundred yards away, looked cold, and grim, and repellent, and abhorrent, except for one sweet warmth inside.

The dark shrubs before it were already powdered with the gathering crust of snow; and the restless wind was driving cloudy swirls of white along and in under the laps of blue slate. So far as I could see, one chimney only was issuing token of some warmth inside. I had scarcely shivered yet in the fierce cold of the road, and the open tracks where no road was; but I shuddered with a deep thrill of anguish and dismay, as I watched that bleak house, with the snow flitting round it, the bitter frost howling in every wild blast, and not a scrap of fire to keep my sweet love's body warm.

"If they have not quite starved her, since her father left," I said to myself, being sure that he was gone, "they will not lose this chance of freezing her to death. I have heard what they do in such weather. They keep her where the water-jugs burst, and the ice is on the pillow, while they roast themselves by a roaring fire. May they roast for ever!"

Slow as I am of imagination, this picture had such an effect upon me, that I caught up my stick which had stood against the tree, and determined to knock the front door in, if they would not admit me decently. But glancing back first, to be sure of having the place to

myself, I beheld through the wind-hurried flakes an advancing figure. Two looks were enough; it was my darling, bending to the wind, but walking bravely, and carrying a basket in her ungloved hand. Her little thin cloak, and summer hat—for they had given her no other—were as white as the ground itself with snow, and so were the clusters of her rich brown hair, which time shall whiten by the side of mine. But her large blue eyes and soft rosy cheeks were glistening bravely through the fleecy veil, and a smile of resolve to make the best of all things showed little teeth whiter than any snowflake. Through the brunt of the storm she had not descried me, until she was suddenly inside my arms.

Then she dropped her basket in the snow, and looked up at me, and tried hard to be vexed. But nature and youth were too many for her, and she threw her glad arms round my neck, and patiently permitted me to leave no snow either on her face or in her curls.

"Oh, Kit, if they should see us from the house!" she whispered; and I said—

"They had better not, or they shall have this stick."

However, for fear of any rashness about that,

I led her with a smooth and easy pace—for she could move beautifully with my arm round her, which no clumsy girl could do—to a snug little nook, where a large bay tree broke the power of the wind, and screened the snow. Here we found a low branch upon which we could sit, with the fragrant leaves to shelter us; and ever since that when I smell a bayleaf, I can never help thinking of my love, even when it is in pickled mackerel.

When I had told her a thousand times of my delight at finding her, and she with a hundred blushes perhaps had begged me to show it judiciously, I asked where she had been in such dreadful weather, and what she had got in the basket. "Two bottles of brandy," she answered as coolly as if it had been a cowslip ball; "from the Bricklayers' Arms I had to fetch them, because nobody else would go out in the storm."

"What!" I cried, looking at her pure and bashful eyes, "do you mean to say that you are sent alone to a common public-house, where the navvies go?"

"Oh, they never say anything to me, dear Kit. But I cannot bear to go, when there are noisy people there. And I believe that my

father would be angry if he knew it. It has only happened once or twice, when the weather was very bad."

"Does she ever send her own daughters there?" I asked as mildly as I could, for Kitty was trembling at my natural wrath, and stern manner.

"Oh no! She would not like to send them at all, even if they would go, which is very doubtful. But she says that my place is to be useful; and she never can do without brandy long. She gets tired of wine in the evening."

"The case is just this," I said, wishing to let off my wrath, that I might speak of more pleasant things; "she revels upon your father's money, and squanders it on her children's whims; she locks him up in a corner of his own house, makes a slave of his only child, starves and beats her, and degrades her by sending her for drink to a pot-house. A young lady—the best, and the sweetest, and noblest——"

I was obliged to stop, in fear of violence. But my dear one became all the dearer to me, as I thought of her misery and patience. If my Uncle Cornelius tried to "put upon" me, was I ever known to put up with it? And consider the difference betwixt an Uncle, who

fed me, and kept me, and allowed me money—or at any rate promised to do so—and a vile stepmother, who ruined the father, and starved and bullied and disgraced the child! Truly we learn to forget right and wrong; as our Country has learned in these latter days.

"No one can degrade me, but myself," Miss Fairthorn answered gently, and without any thought of argument. "But I will not go again, if you think it wrong. I have been so accustomed to run errands for her, that I never gave a thought to the difference at first, and having done it once, I could not say 'no' the next time. But I know it is not nice; and I will never go again, now that I know you object to it, dear. You won't be angry, when I have given you my promise?"

"To send an Angel to a public-house"—but I said no more about it, for the Angel sighed, and put her hand into mine, to be forgiven. Then I asked her, with my wrath turning into jealous pangs, about that old villain, who had dared to imagine that his wealth—if he had any—or at any rate his position, could bridge over the gulf between virtue and vice, loveliness and ugliness, sweet maidenhood and sour decrepitude of bad living. Of these things I

could not speak to her; but her modesty shrank, without knowing why.

"That poor old gentleman has been very ill," she answered in her clear and silvery voice, which made me thrill, like music. "He went to see to some business in Lincolnshire, and was laid up for weeks with ague. But he is to come back when the weather permits. If he had appeared, I would have let you know, for I should have been frightened, with my father not at home. But I am sorry to say there is some one coming, more formidable to me than Sir Cumberleigh is. You will think I am full of dislikes, dear Kit, but I do dislike that Downy so. He is her son Donovan, her only son; and she worships him—if she worships anything."

I had heard of this Donovan Bulwrag more than once, but knew very little about him, except that, unless he was much belied, he combined the vices of both his parents. But my duty was now to reassure my Kitty, and leave her in good spirits, so far as that was possible. Though every minute of her company was as precious as a year of life to me, I was fearful of keeping her longer in the cold, and insuring a very hot reception from her foes. Of the

latter however she had not much dread, being so inured to ill usage, that a little more or less was not of much consideration. But her cloak was threadbare, and her teeth began to chatter, as the keen wind shook the tree above us, and scattered the snow upon our shoulders.

In a few words we arranged to be no longer without frequent news of one another; for I told her very truly, that without this luck I must have gone home in utter misery, unless I had forced my way to her; and with equal sincerity she replied, that she did not know what she could have done, for the time had been dreary and desolate. Then she promised to write to me every week, not long love-letters, for of those there was no need with our pure faith in one another, and her opportunities would be but brief; yet so as to let me know that she was safe, and not persecuted more than usual. These letters she must post with her own hand, and my answers she must call for at a little shop kept by an old servant of the Captain's, who would not betray her. If possible, she would write on Saturdays, so that I might get the letter on a Sunday morning; and if anything were added to her troubles, I might come, and try to let her know of it through Mrs.

Wilcox, who kept the little shop she had spoken of. With this I was obliged to be content for the present; much as I longed for a bolder course, she would not leave her father, without his full consent.

"But you shall have something to remember me by, and something too that came from him," she whispered, as her fears began to grow again. "He gave me a watch on my last birthday, a beautiful watch with a blue enamel back, and Kitty done in little diamonds. She said that it was much too good for me, and she gave it to Geraldine, her youngest girl. But oh, I cheated them out of something, because I felt that they were cheating me. They never knew that he had given me a gold key for it, a lovely little key with a star in the centre. Here it is, see how it sparkles in the dusk! Take it, my dear, and wear it always, and you will think it is the key of my heart, Kit, which you managed to steal down at Sunbury so. You must not give me anything in return. Not now at least; perhaps some day you may."

It was now so dark that I ventured to lead her, and carry her basket to the little side-door, for that part of the house was dark and empty.

Then she gave me a sweet farewell, with one little sob to strengthen it; and the snow whirled into her glistening eyes, and a shiver ran through me, when she was gone.

END OF VOL. I.

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